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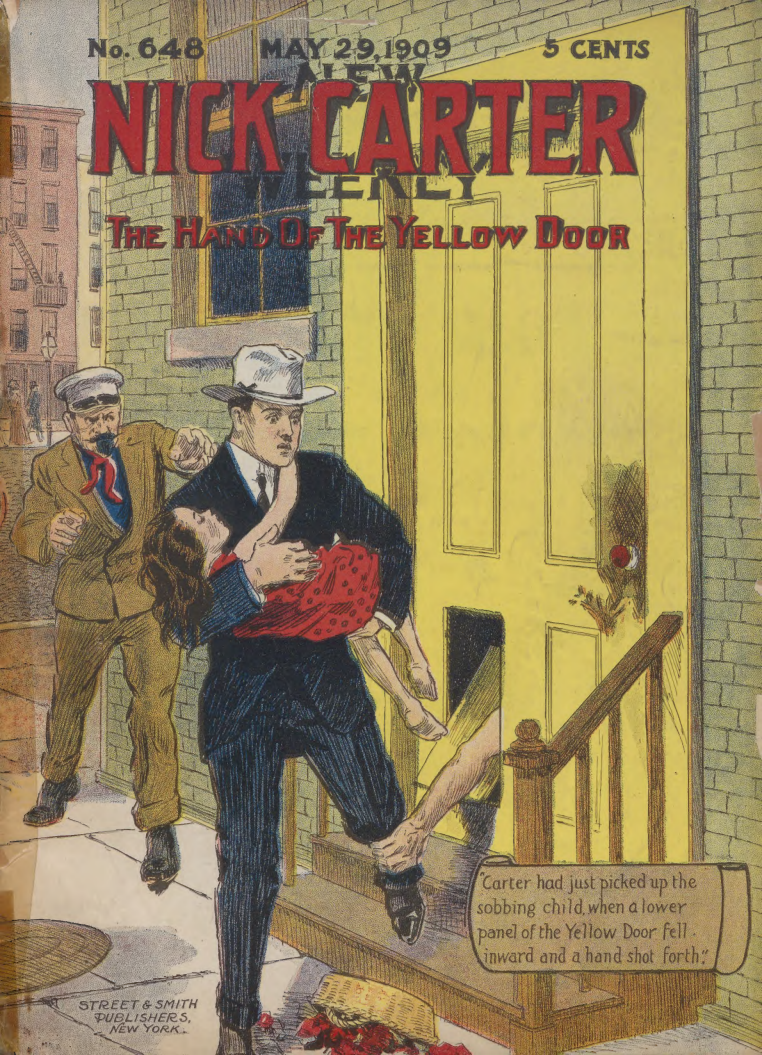
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

THE HAND OF THE YELLOW DOOR



"Carter had just picked up the sobbing child, when a lower panel of the Yellow Door fell inward and a hand shot forth."

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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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THE HOUSE OF THE YELLOW DOOR;

OR,

Nick Carter in the Old French Quarter.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

SOME UNSAVORY INTELLIGENCE.

Nick Carter was bending over a rather aristocratic-looking old gentleman of about his own build, after a warm summer night had closed in.

"I just happened to see you through the window, sir, and was surprised. This is the last place I should have dreamed of looking for you," he was saying, smilingly.

"Mr. Carter, I trust you understand that I am not in the habit of dining here?" explained the other.

"It is a bit singular, I must admit."

"Certainly, most assuredly. I am here because of a strange twist of events."

"That sounds most interesting," remarked Nick calmly.

"I think you will find it so; pray be seated."

The above conversation took place in one of the corner rooms of the Hotel Gonfarone. The famous old restaurant—for the table d'hôte, noons and evenings is the chief attraction—stands between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. It is not more than a short walk from austere Washington Square, and from its unique corner, frowns upon a rather interesting section of old New York.

It was after nine o'clock on a warm summer's evening, and every window was thrown wide open. The tepid breeze just managed to stir the soiled lace curtains. From the middle room was wafted the more or less melodious strains of an Italian orchestra.

Nick Carter pulled out the vacant chair, gave his hat to the waiter and sat down, rather wearily. The man opposite him, with a napkin under his chin, was clean-cut, gray of hair, quick of eye and must have preferred the more elaborate "lobster palaces" of upper Broadway to the French or Italian resorts of the Bleecker Street section. He looked like a prosperous business man, who had few cares and sufficient money.

"Carter, you missed me, didn't you?" the affable gentleman began.

"I certainly did, Mr. Winton."

"What did they tell you at the house?"

"The servant said you had been called away very suddenly."

"And further added that he did not know where I was to be found?"

"Words to that effect, yes."

"But what were you doing down here?"

"I happened down by chance. You see, my dear Mr. Winton, I have not been near Washington Square for some months. The old section always fascinated me. I like to watch progress and business as they weave their webs about the once haughty homes. You can appreciate that—you still insist upon staying on the Square nearby."

"Then you did not think for a moment of finding me here?"

"No, I gave you up. I received your letter early this afternoon. Joseph handed it to me, immediately upon my arrival home, special delivery stamp and all. I reached your house, on the Square, to the dot of eight."

"I must offer an apology, Mr. Carter."

"Absolutely none is necessary, sir. I enjoyed the trip. Came down in my machine, but sent it back alone. I wanted to poke around a bit. I've been here before—Gonfarone's is not unknown to me. That Italian case of the red plush pillow brought me to this very street last year."

"But I must explain the reason for not keeping my appointment. I am quite upset, quite worried."

"Still, you are managing to eat a bite?"

"Admitted, yet, with a purpose, Mr. Carter. Every second I expect to receive extraordinary news—a message."

"Business?"

"On the contrary, it is closely associated with the affair of which I wrote to you. I had hoped to go over this matter in the privacy of my own study, but circumstances have prevented—circumstances that I could scarcely have anticipated. Won't you have something to drink, Mr. Carter?"

"Never touch a drop, thank you. Please proceed. Stop, just a moment; if you will turn your face two inches farther to the right, not a word can be heard behind you. Ah, much better; now proceed."

"This morning—it was quite early—I had just descended to the lower floor for my breakfast, when my housekeeper apprised me of the unpleasant fact that some twenty thousand dollars' worth of silver plate had been stolen during the night. Our private chests—they belonged to my grandfather—had been rifled."

"A rich haul."

"I should say so. Some of the silver could not be replaced. It is what I might term 'priceless,' not only because of historic and personal association, but for actual weight in silver. The large chest, containing this ware stood in the breakfast room."

"You kept it constantly locked, I presume?"

"Invariably. The chest was the equivalent of a safe. My retinue of servants is such, that I never once anticipated theft. My staff has stood for years. If I gave a little blow-out to the boys, I did drag out a few of the pieces; otherwise, they were not disturbed."

"How long has it been since one of these 'blow-outs,' as you term them, occurred?"

"More than two months. The chest stood against the north wall. It was covered with a red cloth, and potted ferns have rested on it since the early summer."

"I see."

"The breakfast room, at this early hour I mention, I found in a state of semi-confusion. The ferns and dishes had been flung to the floor, earth and plants. The scarf was in still another place, and the chest was empty!"

"A robbery had evidently taken place?"

"It most certainly had. The silver plate was missing. Not a remnant of it remained. Now, Mr. Carter, here is where my story becomes complicated. I have every reason to suppose that one of my own servants, one of my most trusted men, is the guilty person."

"You surprise me."

"Nevertheless, there can be little doubt of it. The man I refer to is a Frenchman. At one time, he was a waiter in Paris. My own grandfather became acquainted with him abroad, took a liking to him, and when he moved to New York, brought François Le Jeune, then a very young man, along. He smacked of the student quarter and was very much at home, so far as metropolitan manners and customs went, in our city. He grew up with the family and, in turn, became part and parcel of my own little retinue."

"Do you know of his parentage?"

"Nothing that would interest you."

"Why should you suspect François?"

"Because François has absolutely disappeared from the house."

"He may be off on a periodical plunge—most of them occasionally do."

"The man never touched a drop. He is well along in years, extremely taciturn, self-reserved and silent. I could never get a word out of him, without much stress. He never liked to talk."

"Still, I fail to see why François should be definitely blamed."

"Mr. Carter, I have not finished. His room, on the top floor, was discovered in much confusion. He had packed all of his belongings, that were of any value. The day before, I recalled that he had asked for his month's wages. You must admit that it does not look bright for François. I summoned you as soon as I could. I want your assistance. The plate alone makes it worth while; I place a sentimental value upon the pieces."

"It would seem scarcely a case in my line, Mr. Winton. Our mutual regard for each other will necessarily influence me to see that the best men are placed on the case, but——"

"Just a moment, Mr. Carter."

"Well."

"Something new, something still more serious has arisen since my letter."

"Proceed, sir."

"While dining at home this very evening a note was brought in by Marie, the maid. It had been handed to her at the door. A man rang the bell—she could not see his face in the dark. I want you to read this note."

Winton reached for his light coat, pulled a letter in a rough envelope therefrom, and handed the same

to the detective. Carter ran down the roughly scrawled page.

This is what he read:

"MR WINTON: The first step has been taken in what will prove a serious matter to you. We have gotten away with your silverware and it will not end there. Even your own life may be forfeited. Dine to-night at the Gonfarone. Sit by one of the street window tables. You will receive further information. This is by no means a threat, but our advice is for you to comply with our request. You shall have something of interest to see and hear. We are not to be treated in a trivial fashion. Keep that well in mind."

At the bottom of the note, a peculiar series of three red dots had been fashioned in triangular shape. The note was in pencil; the dots in red ink. Nick Carter pushed the sheet into the envelope and handed it slowly back to Winton.

"I would not look upon this seriously, sir," he commented.

"Why not?"

"Because, some Italian aggregation have you in mind. They want money—blood-money, that is all. Hundreds of such cases crop. I could mention them without number. They would not really dare molest you."

"But François was French—pure French."

"I will not attempt to explain that. François, I should say, from what I know, had nothing to do with the matter."

"He did not steal the silverware?"

"I mean just that."

"But the circumstances?"

"You have given me no actual proof."

"Nevertheless, you may well realize that I am upset. I dropped my favorite cup of tea and my copy of the *Post* to trot down to this place. You would call it, what?—fear?"

"I did not intimate that—we shall say curiosity."

"I am afraid to disregard these silent messages. You know Kerrington. He was shot at his own desk in Wall Street."

"Bosh."

"You will not look at it seriously?"

"I think you should smile, Mr. Winton. Two rats in a side saloon could do this overnight, with only your weakness to justify it. Murder is the last resort for such criminals. I am afraid that your old consideration for François has had much to do with your visit to this place."

"I liked, almost loved the man."

"Ah, so I supposed."

"I am wondering what will happen."

"Nothing, and yet, I see you have followed instructions."

Nick Carter pulled back the flapping lace curtains. He could see the warm, dark streets beyond.

"And the spaghetti was not half bad, I really enjoyed it."

"You have a species of the Black Hand at your back door, perhaps," the detective smiled. He was not inclined to treat the matter with grave consideration at the time, for long acquaintance with Winton had brought forth the certain knowledge that he was of a highly excitable calibre and could be suddenly moved by any bit of new 'business' which he did not fully understand.

"Suppose I walk over to the house with you, Mr. Winton," Nick suggested. "I should like, at any rate, to have a view of your silver chest and the room of the late lamented François. I may be of some minor assistance to you."

"But they may come."

"We will start, nevertheless."

Carter was reaching for his hat. He had sipped the last drop of the German water in his slender glass.

A puff of wind seemed to blow apart the curtains.

Yet, was it the wind? A bit of cardboard unexpectedly fluttered upon the smooth tablecloth, turned over a few times, and dropped motionless within Nick's reach.

"There, didn't I tell you?" Winton gasped, snatching at the card. "A message."

CHAPTER II.

IN THE OLD FRENCH QUARTER.

Nick Carter invariably made it a rule never to anticipate trouble—never to cross bridges before he came to them. If it were possible to look upon the happy, sunny side of life he did so. He had found, through long years of experience, that this paid. Many clients came to him with imaginary troubles and tribulations. Winton was very apt to incline this way. Of a high-strung nature, with hair-trigger nerves, the least incident upset him.

Nick, however, as we shall soon see, was forced to look with far more earnestness upon Winton's case.

For the second time that night, the detective read an anonymous missive. This later clue was in the shape of a square card, as we have already stated. Nick was impressed with the grammatical exactness of these notes, brief and pointed as they were.

"What does it say?" Winton inquired eagerly, fearfully.

But Nick Carter was half through the open window. He faced McDougal street, the warm summer night air in his face and the curtains flapping against both cheeks.

The street was practically deserted.

Winton was nagging at his coat sleeve.

"They made their getaway in approved quick order," the detective responded, sinking back into his chair.

"But the card, the card," his companion insisted.

"I will read it to you, so:

"'Find the House of the Yellow Door. You will be admitted. Come to-morrow night without fail. We shall expect you'—and then we have the same mysterious red dots," Carter added, grimly.

"What do they mean?"

"The bottom line may explain that."

"Still more?"

"Yes. This line has been added at the bottom of the card: 'In the Old French Quarter.'"

"But I am ignorant of such a locality."

"And I know it by heart, Mr. Winton. I have been there before. Not so far from here, by the way. Roughly speaking, I should say that what we might call the Old French Quarter lies between certain boundary streets: Green Street, then down to Fourth, Sullivan and McDougal, Bedford, Christopher, Charles and Greenwich Avenue help to hem in our scattered portion. The present site is most unsavory. Few of the old original French remain, Italians, negroes and Irish now populate these streets."

"I have never been in the district mentioned."

"The police have tightened things," Nick Carter explained, "you do not hear so much of our old quarter. The Black Cat was burned out and nothing but a dusty old image remains over a dead memory. I recall the famous assassination of one of the district attorney's men there—the tossing of a smoking revolver down from an open window and the later escape before a selected coroner's jury of the woman in the case. Now the Black Cat, as we once knew it, is no more. Then take Chick Tucker's joint on Sullivan Street, below Third. The big Western guns were once wont to collect there and listen to the old mechanical piano, as they sipped their drinks. Strong-arm men have been forced to seek silence and drink elsewhere, for Chick's place is closed also. Too many murders—too much shady business."

"How do you keep track of these place, Mr. Carter; it seems marvelous to me?"

"Because that is my business."

"Mr. Carter, I may be a coward, you can tell me that I am, nevertheless, I shudder when I think of this affair to-night. Are you willing to assist me now? You have proof of danger in your own hands. I can well understand that a petty theft of silverware would not interest you, no matter what the fee; you demand human interest with every case."

"Mr. Winton, I can foresee trouble."

"So, so, then I was right."

"I think you are."

"Is François mixed up in this?"

"That I cannot tell."

"What would you advise?"

"Home, for you, immediately. Take a closed carriage."

"But it is only a step."

"I said a closed carriage. I will see you to it."

"But what of you?"

"I will find the 'House of the Yellow Door.'"

"Is it known to you now?"

"I never heard of such a place."

"You are going right out to-night?"

"I am."

"Then the case must interest you, indeed?"

"I will confess that it does."

"When shall I see you again, when shall I hear from you?"

"Some time in the morning. I shall want you to go with me."

"On short notice."

"On very short notice; you may have an opportunity to see the Old French Quarter for the first time."

"That need not be necessary."

"Ah, yes, you must still keep your engagements."

"You refer to the card?"

"I refer to this card, yes."

"Can this not be avoided?"

"We shall see, sir, we shall see."

"I am subject to your commands, Mr. Carter, I—I must be."

"In that event, I may as well inform you that in"—Carter looked at his watch—"in one hour from now a new individual will become a part and parcel of your household. Chick—dear old Chick, one of my real reliables, will appear suddenly. He will sleep and live under your roof for a few days. Make it possible for him to come in with no special blow or flurry. He will reach your house, I trust, within an hour. I shall telephone him immediately."

"You deem this necessary?"

"It is a precaution."

"I have guests, I had forgotten to tell you that."

"Who?"

"A Mr. James Hollingsworth and his daughter."

"Friends, I presume."

"Hollingsworth is an old chum of mine. We went to college together in California. He took to the newspaper racket out there, met up with mining interests and is now a millionaire."

"Here on a visit?"

"Yes, brought his daughter along; a mighty pretty girl, too, Mr. Carter, still in her teens. They have been here in little old New York for three days. I made them stop with me."

"What brought Hollingsworth to New York—business?"

"His daughter, Estelle. The girl has an affliction of the eyes. They are afraid she is going blind. It is all she can do to see, as it is. She is being treated by a specialist here."

"Oh."

While Nick Carter conversed, he felt that he was being watched. At one of the corner tables sat a black-eyed girl, rather flashily dressed. She was obviously French, and her skin was as clear and as smooth as a flower petal. From the moment he had taken a

seat at Winton's table, those flashing black eyes had been leveled in his direction.

It might have been only curiosity, yet Carter suspected the contrary. When he did look at the girl, it was a straightforward glance, deep down into the dusky orbs. She did not flinch. The glance was met boldly and almost defiantly.

The detective said nothing of this, however, as he left the room with Winton. They walked out into Eighth Street, just as a car was jangling past.

"I can walk to my place easily enough," Winton exclaimed. But Nick Carter would not have it that way.

He signaled a cab, and was content, only when he saw the vehicle clatter away through the night in the direction of Washington Square.

Alone, standing at the corner, the detective hesitated.

Which direction should he select?

He must scour the Old French Quarter, immediately.

One section lay directly south of Washington Square; the other was painfully mixed up with Jones Street, Cornelia, Commerce and Carmine. This latter portion meant the hang-outs around Jefferson Market, the Jefferson Market Court and its side streets with tiny, dingy shyster-lawyer offices. It meant a dodging from the West Side Savings Bank to the Hudson River tunnel of the subway, elevated tracks, small stores, and pathetic gloom. The detective decided upon the other trail. Therefore, he walked rapidly down to Washington Square, continuing along McDougal Street, until only old-fashioned two-story dwellings and shops surrounded him.

"The House of the Yellow Door."

That sentence he repeated, over and over again.

No, he had never heard of the place. He knew the gloomy, deserted "Tucker" joint as he passed it, and there was Jack Lee's café on Bleecker. Why not try this out! The sporting fraternity frequented Jack's saloon, the young men of the community with muscle and loose change. It was a favorite hang-out. Why not make the effort?

Past Third Street the detective wandered, with no apparent hurry, turned into Bleecker and reached Jack's in good time. It was now after ten and the sweltering neighborhood reeked with gamins and with various odors.

An occasional hand organ added to the noise of the night.

Carter was well dressed. He did not fit the community for a second, yet this did not deter him, for he knew many of the hang-outs and their proprietors. There was no opportunity for a hurried disguise and he did not welcome it, anyway.

With no hesitancy, he opened the swinging doors of the saloon and entered, sauntering up to the greasy bar.

The place was heavily hung with smoke. It was crowded, as well, with a gang that might have interested any social society for the prevention of crime.

A little girl, barefooted, was running in the direction of the door. She carried a faded basket, containing flowers—and she was crying.

Out of sheer pity, the detective reached in his pocket and drew out a quarter. He handed it to the child.

"This for you," he murmured in her frightened ear. Some one had watched that gift.

A man slouched from the lunch counter. He was fat and coarse and half intoxicated.

In a trice, his paw had lunged forward, and he had snatched away the coin. The little girl sobbed out a short word of remonstrance.

"I won't stand for that," Carter exclaimed, "give her back her money."

The brute glared sullenly at him.

"What you got to say about it, eh?"

"It was my money."

"And dat's my gal."

"But I gave the money to the child," Carter insisted.

"You leave us alone, me an' mine," was the sullen answer, and the man staggered over to the bar while Nick Carter sheltered the child with a protecting arm.

"Where do you live, kid," he whispered. "I'll see you out of this. Get home, see, get home. Where do you live?"

Two wondering, pathetic eyes stared upward.

"I kin find me way dere," she retorted, "honest I kin. Han' me out one more er dem; de ole man has his hooks on de fus'. You got it, you got plenty. Come on."

Carter reached for his pocket.

"I want you to go home," he muttered, "please do, it's late. If I give you another quarter will you go?"

"Sure t'ing."

"Can you find your way home?"

"Ah, cut dat, mister, dere ain't no missin' my place. Yaller door in front; I cud see it in de dark."

At which remark, Nick Carter was proportionately amazed and interested as the reader may well imagine.

CHAPTER III.

THE CASE BECOMES SERIOUS.

It had been Carter's intention to loaf around Lee's saloon for a while and eventually make inquiries as to any possible house with a yellow door. He imagined that it must be some new café or saloon or rendezvous for crooks that had cropped up without his knowledge. The meeting with the little flower girl was not a part of the programme. It was one of those incidents that may never be reckoned on or accounted for.

In everyday life these coincidences transpire when we least expect them. And Nick was lucky for the night.

"Who is that man?" the detective asked.

He had led the child from the saloon.

"Me fadder."

"And you sell flowers for a living?"

"Fer him, yes, sir."

"You have no mother?"

"No, sir. I ain't got none, she's dead."

"Where do you live?"

"Minetta Lane."

Nick Carter started.

This was the very worst section of the Old French quarter. There was a Minetta Street, a Minetta Lane and still a Minetta court. Negroes and the worst types of criminal persons infested that locality. It was a hive of ingenious crime festering and unhealthy.

"You live in Minetta Lane?" the detective repeated.

"Yes, sir."

"And your house has a yellow door?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is that the name of the house?"

"I don't know what youse mean, sir."

"Is it a restaurant or a hotel or anything. Do they call it The House with the Yellow Door?"

"No, sir; I don't know nothing on that. Jes' yaller door an' we live upstairs."

"I want to see you safely home, little girl."

"Youse don't need ter do dat, sir. I kin fin' me way. I knows dis place."

"Nevertheless, I shall go with you. How many flowers have you in your basket."

"Twenty cents wort'."

"Here is a dollar bill. Keep it for yourself. Now let us go to Minetta Lane."

"Aw, go on, mister."

"I want you to go home."

The child, with a hard, set face, had grown suddenly suspicious, a suspicion that was ingrown. Parentage and blood must have counted.

"Here, take de flowers."

"You may keep them."

"But I got de coin."

"I know that. Now, for home."

Despite all his cleverness, Nick Carter could not persuade the child to lead the way to Minetta Lane. He was compelled to resort to a ruse. Even this did not work out as he could have wished. He left his new friend on the corner, and walked back, up the dark, narrow street, keeping his eye upon her all the while. She had no intention of going to Minetta Lane just then; in fact, she crossed streets, finally approaching the saloon again.

Nick, however, had received his clue.

He headed for Minetta Street, with all possible speed, dodging past gaping wounds in the byway, where night push carts were being unloaded of fruit and rags and bottles and junk of every description.

He was compelled to walk back down McDougal Street from Bleecker. Between this and Third Street lay his place. It was dingy, dark and repulsive, and half way up, the lane cut from the main street. This lane was barely wide enough to allow a junk cart to pass, and twisted down a tortuous way until it ended in the severe walls of the old Chiesa Della Madonna Di Pompei, a church of grotesque if imposing lines.

The Italian element was here strongly marked.

Carter watched every chance door on either side as he progressed. The night was advancing, and, inasmuch as he was dressed at complete variance with the criminally negligent fashion of the community, he felt intuitively for his revolver. Those sharp turns, and tiny winding alleys might shelter the dagger or the sandbag. Only three days before a particularly dastardly murder had taken place not far from the section, Italians and negroes being jumbled up in its secret mechanism.

He was discouraged, ten minutes later, when his search brought him up against the church and there had been no sign of the house with the yellow door.

The flower girl might have been merely lying in the inveterate style of her class.

"I shall have one more try at it, anyway," Nick Carter ruminated. He started back down the gloomy, ill-smelling lane.

Nick was destined to meet with more luck this time and the peculiarity of this success there could be no denying.

A man, wearing a dirty green sweater, with the collar rolled up under his chin, his face an insult to man's model and the bulldog look of a desperate character, was slouching in Nick's direction, on the opposite side of the slimy street. He appeared to see the detective suddenly and to make up his mind to some act with the same trained alertness, for he deliberately crossed and came face to face with Carter at an unusual angle of one of the two-story, old-fashioned buildings.

With some evil intent, his burly figure checking Nick's progress, the intruder scratched a match against the side wall, sheltered the flame with a big, coarse hand, looking through his open fingers at the same second. He was sizing up his man, and the match gave enough light to bring out a well-attired, clean-cut gentleman.

Nick Carter was on his guard. The trick was as old to him, as it was to that quarter. His hand had gone slowly to his revolver pocket as the stranger started to veer from his original path.

But the real surprise was in an entirely different direction.

The light from that one match, before it flickered and went out, had sent a thousand shadows dancing in the corners of the projecting house. Nick Carter had not noted, on his first trip down, the door that formed a part of the niche. The fact that, in its zigzag winding across, the street building had no line of regularity accounted for innumerable trap windows, alley entrances and picturesque cellar doors.

That single portal, paneled at top and bottom was painted yellow. Time had worn it to a state of shabbiness, yet there was no possibility of mistaking the color. At night, yellow being one of the tones strangely affected and altered by counter colors and illumina-

'tions, this door still glared with a marvelous strength of comparison. Walking down the lane, it might not be seen at all; the return brought it more distinctly to notice.

And the flickering flame of a match had attracted Nick to the very clue he was most eager to pursue.

"Ain't got the time, hev ye?" the obtrusive tough barked, with no obvious intention of stepping aside.

"Let's see—I guess I have," Nick Carter retorted, his tongue like a whiplash. "How is that—look for yourself. My time may be a little fast."

The crook was looking into the ugly little open end of a flashing revolver held by a hand that seldom ever made a mistake—in that direction.

"Now," the detective resumed, being cautious not to raise his voice, since a call might swarm the lane, "having assured you that it is at least time for you to get a very quick hustle on you, at any rate, nothing seems to remain but to watch you do it. If you don't reach the corner in one minute, I can't be responsible for the consequences. This gun is fretting to give trouble to a man of about your calibre."

"Got me right," was the cursing grumble. "I'm it, bo. So long."

With no further parley, Nick's assailant beat it for the open and the better-lighted trails beyond.

"Bad place down here," Carter said to himself, "bad—bad."

Half unconsciously, he had walked ahead. He turned, facing the niche and the yellow door.

It seemed a wild goose chase, viewed in the light of calm reflection, this searching out a spot but vaguely mentioned upon the mysterious card.

For all the possibility of mistake, the detective experienced an inward sensation of relief. This must be the place, unquestionably. Was there ever a house like it before; ever a portal of the same uncanny, wooden texture? With eyes trained to soon accustom themselves to the semi-gloom, Nick Carter discerned the misty, shadowy contour of the den, crouching in the filth of Minetta Lane.

At this day in looking over his indexed cards, with special reference to the odd houses of New York, we find the following notation:

This was carefully filed at Double-X:

"'House of the Yellow Door.' Old French Quarter, near Minetta Street and Chiesa Della Madonna Di Pompei. Two-story shanty, at the least, fifty-seven or sixty years constructed. Corner projects beyond line of neighboring houses. Yellow door, slightly lower but broader than the ordinary, set in this projection, and not at first noticeable. One window on first floor. Three above. Shutter, green. Quaintly pitched roof. For description of interior, refer to XXX—2456."

The reader, however, must be content to await developments, for it was only following the most exciting and dangerous adventures, beyond those shabby walls that the detective ever finished the three X written paragraphs concerning one of his most extraordinary cases.

There were no lights visible in the windows and no signs of life so far as he could make out. The night was stuffy and uncomfortable, yet the four windows were barred and fastened. Content for the time being, Nick Carter retraced his steps, swung in a circle, that finally brought him again into West Third Street. He knew of a little cellar resort, the Belvedere, and there were questions he wanted to ask one George Tavernier, provided the Frenchman happened to be there.

Nick nodded pleasantly to the stout proprietor on entering. Seated at one of the tables to the rear was a familiar figure.

"Why howdy, Mr. Carter," the fellow exclaimed, yet guardedly.

"Glad to see you, George."

"Haven't seen you in the deuce of a while; not since that Cesar murder. Things changed around here. We're gettin' good; Tuck's closed, you know."

"Yes, I heard about it." Nick returned, dropping into a chair by the Frenchman, "what will you have to drink, George?"

"My old favorite."

"Grappa?"

"Yep."

"Say, that white stuff will eat your heart out, George."

"Only stuff that will touch the spot, Mr. Carter."

"Have it your own way;" he called for the bartender. "One grappa and a fresh bottle of plain soda."

The order was served and from a long bottle George gulped down a liberal portion of glittering white brandy, as hard as nails and as hot as mustard. A few persons were beginning to drift into the bar, the majority hanging around the front rail.

"You know this old section very well, don't you, George?"

"I hope I do, Mr. Carter."

"And you've helped me more than once?"

"I think I owe it to you, sir, after the Carmine Street stabbing, when you pulled a trick in my favor."

"Needn't mention it, George. I had almost forgotten the incident. Now I want to get some information."

"Guess I can hit it off."

"Do you know of a place in the Old French Quarter that goes by the name of 'The House of the Yellow Door?'"

Tavernier ran his cigarette-stained fingers through his tawny hair and frowned.

"No, sir; I don't."

"Sure of that?"

"Dead certain."

"What about the Minetta Street and lane section?"

"Oh, you mean Marie Felix's nest. I see, yes, come to think of it, that side door *is* painted yellow."

"Now we are progressing. No other yellow doors around here that you can call to mind?"

"No, sir."

"Why was it painted yellow?"

"Can't tell you; don't know."

"Who is Marie Felix?"

"Frenchwoman; been in New York only a month."

"Does she own that house?"

"I think she has a title to it. I haven't been around there since she moved in. I heard the fellows talking about her."

"Rather dingy quarters for Marie, I should say; that street is in bad repute and is black in more than one way."

"Coons?"

"Of course."

"I guess the woman has her own reasons. She's married, though and as far as I know, Mr. Carter, it's straight there. They might run a little quiet game with a wheel or cards—nothing more."

"Does she occupy the whole house, two stories?"

"Guess so."

At this moment, the side door swung open, to the ripple of a woman's laugh. A rather pretty, dark-skinned girl ran in, a swarthy Frenchman following her. They swept past the table at which Carter and Tavernier were seated.

Instantly the detective was on the alert.

It was the same woman he had seen in the dining room at the Hotel Gonfarone—the same pretty, fascinating Frenchwoman who had so intently eyed him, during his conversation with Mr. Winton.

CHAPTER IV.

A MURDER UNDER GLASS.

"When did the Belvedere start permitting women to come in here?" Nick Carter resumed, lowering his voice, the man and his companion had taken the last table, back against the wall; as yet, the young French girl had not noticed the detective.

"It happens once in a while," Tavernier responded.

"Do you know those two?"

"I know the man, but the girl is a new one in this section. Peach, isn't she?"

"Never saw her before?"

"Rather pretty for that type. Who is the man? Yes, I know him, but I tell you the girl is a stranger. Him—that's Girardin, Pierre Girardin."

"Crook?"

"Well, now, Mr. Carter, you don't want me to tell you too much, do you?"

"Call me, when I'm trespassing, George. I'd like to know about Pierre."

"Well, he's just out. Was up for three years. I think he hit the old grounds last Wednesday. Got his man over cards but the evidence wasn't sporty. He got it light."

"Card man?"

"Yep."

It was growing decidedly late, and, as Nick Carter desired to get a very early start on the following morning, he arose from the table. The room was crowded, smoke circled it and the subdued chatter of many voices buzzed from door to door.

"Good night, George."

"Good night, sir."

The detective had not left the table when the French girl threaded her way hurriedly through to his side, pulled out the chair that he had just vacated, and sat down, her cheeks very flushed, her eyes bright.

"What is your hurry?"

She spoke with a delicate little accent.

The move was an unexpected one to Nick Carter, and, at first, he was at a loss for words. The woman had recognized him, despite the smoke and the crowd and the excitement. Then Nick had not been mistaken when he imagined there was more than commonplace interest in the glances bestowed upon him by the dark-skinned beauty of Gonfarone's.

"I was just leaving?" the detective replied, sparring for time.

"But what's your hurry," the girl repeated.

"I have other fish to fry."

Nick smiled as he said this.

Before Nick could interfere, the excited woman had banged a silver pitcher upon the table, smartly, half angrily. The noise resounded through the whole room and there was a temporary lull in conversation. Every one looked over in that direction.

"Better sneak," George whispered in the detective's ears, "I think she's out for trouble."

"See him—that man," the woman exclaimed, staring at Carter and pointing her finger directly at him, "Carter, Nick Carter, the famous detective. Have a good look, will you—every one."

For a second the silence was intense, then disgruntled growls and curses arose. In some sections, where crime is the only marketable product, the detective and police fraternity of a certain calibre is not looked upon with any too much favor.

"I'll get you out," George again whispered.

Nick Carter was more inclined to take the matter in his own hands. He did not want to raise a disturbance, and invoke violence, least of all, but they were hedging in on him, and his eyes were shifting across to the side door. The stone steps that led to the street were very desirable at the moment.

In one bound he had reached that door, and to do it, he was compelled to cause two persons some discomfort; one was the pretty French girl; she was nagging at his arm and trying to balance herself at the same time. The push he gave her as he plunged outward sent her rattling, banging against the table, and she fell. A man, her escort, Pierre Girardin, knife in hand, was obstructing the door. The first thing Pierre knew, a fist had been planted between his eyes, his knife whizzed to a far corner, sticking point first, into the flooring and the detective's escape was

practically accomplished. Up the stone side steps he dashed, scampering away at top speed, in the direction of Washington Square.

It was scarcely probable that he would be followed, for his getaway had been one of quickness and dispatch. Once, a block off, he turned in the soggy, hot night to glance back over his shoulder; two or three persons were gathered on the pave in front of the saloon but there had been no well-defined attempt at pursuit.

"That girl must know a great deal," Nick muttered, puzzled deeply, that the French woman should so quickly and so mysteriously have landed on his trail.

Madison Avenue was his next goal.

A taxicab spun him home in an incredibly short time, since he had given impatient instructions to that effect. Dignified Joseph was in prompt attendance at the door. He was not at all the same impassive, reserved Joseph, however.

He appeared to be laboring under an explosive type of mental stress.

"Mr. Carter," he began, "Mr. Chickering telephoned twice during the last half hour."

"Oh, he did, eh?"

"Yes, sir; a matter of great importance."

"Did Chick go up to Washington Square, per my phone message to him?"

"He left ten minutes after we received your call."

"He went to the Winton house?"

"That was where he said he was going."

"And now you say he has called me up twice?"

"He has, sir."

"Well, about what?"

"He left the number. That was all he said, but the minute you reached here, you were to call *him* up. Shall I get him on the wire?"

"Immediately, Joseph."

"Mr. Garvan is out looking for you, sir."

"Why should Patsy go?"

"Mr. Chick took that liberty. He had Mr. Garvan on the wire and they talked for a few minutes; Patsy said he would do his best to locate you; I think he started out for some Italian restaurant near Washington Square."

"Yes, yes; Mr. Winton must have told Chick. Now, Joseph, quick, get Chick."

"Yes, sir."

Nick Carter went to the phone with very natural misgivings.

"Hello, is that you, Chick?"

"Yes, Nick."

"Where are you?"

"In Mr. Winton's residence—his private office to be exact. The deuce to pay here."

"More trouble?"

"I should say so—murder."

"What?"

Nick could not restrain the exclamation.

"Murder of the worst and most mysterious kind."

"Give me a little hurried data. I'll be right there."

"A young woman?"

"Who?"

"A Miss Estelle Hollingsworth—guest here."

The detective knew in an instant who was signified by this statement. Winton had vaguely intimated that the girl was being treated for weak eyes, having accompanied her father from the coast.

And now she had been murdered in Winton's own home!

"When did this occur?" Nick inquired in a breath.

"We can't tell exactly."

"You learned of it an hour or so ago."

"Yes, I've tried twice to get you; even asked Patsy to go on a still hunt, around where Mr. Winton saw you last."

"I will be up immediately."

"I wish you would."

"Is Winton there?"

"He is prostrated. Wants you."

"Good-by."

"Good-by, Nick."

Danny, the chauffeur, fortunately had not taken Nick's machine "out of harness." When Carter was abroad on a case, it was Danny's wise plan to stand in readiness, day or night. He may have anticipated trouble. In any event, Nick Carter, a very short while afterward was seated in Winton's private office. He was alone with Chick, that energetic soul having, in a way, taken things under control and held the disturbed and distraught household together.

"Where is Winton now?" was Nick's initial query.

"Attended by his own physician in the next room. He fainted when the news was broken to him."

"Is the girl's father here?"

"No, we can't find him. All we know is that he is attending a big banquet of some kind and has not returned as yet. No one seems to know where the banquet was held."

"Terrible, isn't it, Chick?"

"Wait until you see."

"Where is the body?"

"To the rear of the house, just as it was discovered. It has not been touched."

"One of the rooms?"

"No, in a sort of glass conservatory, apart from the main building, a glass-encased room filled with growing plants."

"Have you notified headquarters?"

"I wanted to wait for you."

"I shall attend to that. Now, Chick, give me a little inside history before I go back. Who found the body?"

"A maid. I can tell you in a few minutes, for there is precious little to tell. Miss Estelle arose with the family at nine this morning."

"I see."

"Her father accompanied her to the office of a Fifth Avenue eye specialist. They had lunch at Martins—the old place, at the corner of Ninth street and University Place. I think they call it the Hotel

Lafayette now. Old Hollingsworth has been in the habit of going there for years, when his business brought him to New York."

"At what time did they return here?"

"In the neighborhood of three or half past. Hollingsworth put a few finishing touches to his toilet and went out again, the banquet in mind. He was to meet certain wine merchants, I believe, beforehand. He owns California vineyards and is a heavy stockholder."

"Yes."

"From questioning the servants, I find very little is known of the girl's movements after that. She must have remained in her room resting. She could not move around freely, for her eyes had been bandaged. She could not see through that bandage."

"It is pitiful, Chick, I am beginning to appreciate the small points, the anguish of it."

"The French maid, one of three in the house, a young woman of twenty-seven or nine, Agathe Azier, late in the afternoon, went to Miss Hollingsworth's room. The girl was in pain and restless. She asked to be led to the conservatory. She had been there before and loves flowers."

"Was the maid to call for the young woman?"

"Yes, but Miss Hollingsworth left word that she did not care for any dinner. She preferred not to partake of anything after the operation on her eyes."

"Were the electric lights burning when the maid returned."

"They were. Agathe Azier reëntered the conservatory, she says, at ten or fifteen minutes after seven. She took a casual look around but did not see Miss Hollingsworth. She supposed that, somewhat better, she had become weary and gone to her room, which would not have been very difficult."

"And the lights were on then?"

"She says so."

"Who turned them on?"

"She did not say."

"Proceed."

"Nothing of importance appears to have transpired after that for some time. I know I arrived at the house in good season, and met Mr. Winton, who had reached here in a cab, he said, under your instructions. He took me up to the missing servant's old room and to the breakfast hall. Time passed. It was, I believe, after twelve, when we two—and were in this very room—heard a horrible series of shrieks from the rear of the house and from the ground floor. Mr. Winton was very, very nervous, anyway. I insisted that he remain here. I went down the stairs to the lower hall, I met Agathe, the maid. She almost fell into my arms, and she was well nigh crazed."

"She had been to the conservatory?"

Chick hid his face in his hands at some terrible memory.

"Nick," he managed to gasp, "I can't tell you, I can't. I have never witnessed such a sight in my whole professional career."

CHAPTER V.

THE CASE MINUS CLUES.

That Chickering Carter was unusually impressed by what he had seen was evident. Chick had witnessed death in manifold forms and was hardened to the commonplace of crime, but Nick appreciated the sweeping sensations that were racking his clever assistant.

"Then the maid, Agathe did return to the conservatory?"

"She did."

"Why at this unusual hour?"

"As I have said, she supposed Miss Hollingsworth to be in her own apartments upstairs. She is on the second floor, front, a corner room. When it came to be nine, the maid knocked upon the door. She had eaten her own dinner in the quarters."

"Rather neglectful, I should say."

"No, I don't think so, Nick, after hearing the facts. Miss Hollingsworth was a peculiar girl. Her affliction made her unduly sensitive. She liked to be alone. Company embarrassed and fretted her. It finally occurred to the maid to knock at the door and see if the young woman desired anything done for her before retiring."

"Agathe had not acted the part of a full-fledged maid up to this period?"

"She did not attend at the night hours, no. Miss Estelle would have none of it. I know that Agathe brought a tray to the door of that room upon her first visit, because I have asked below and verified the fact. She thought the young lady might take a bit of toast and tea."

"But she received no response?"

"Her summons was not answered. Thinking that Miss Hollingsworth had retired, the maid went to bed herself. She could not sleep. She tells me that she was haunted in her dreams. She started out of bed and made a last visit to the upstairs room. This time she opened the door with a private key, and found the room was empty. The bed had not been touched. Everything was as it had been early in the afternoon. It frightened her."

"I should rather suppose so."

"Feeling a certain amount of personal responsibility, and without warning any one in the house, she went at once to the conservatory. She says that the lights were still burning, although it would be supposed that some of the other servants might have turned them out. What she finally saw under that glass dome, Nick, must have sent her away well nigh crazed—for I saw it myself."

"Just a moment—then the maid went farther into the room than she had at the time of her first visit."

"Yes, she thought perhaps Miss Hollingsworth might possibly have wandered behind one of the big potted ferns or the geranium racks. The conservatory is rather complicated in its arrangements."

"She searched the place for her mistress?"

"She rummaged around until—she found the body."

"How long has the physician been with Winton?"

"An hour, or thereabouts."

"Do you think he will stay for some time?"

"He might stay the night, for all I know."

"What of the servants?"

"They are all in their quarters, to the rear."

"And Agathe?"

"Is in her own room, I understand."

"Can you lead me to the conservatory?"

"Without the slightest trouble."

"First I must phone headquarters."

"I should certainly think so, Nick."

Nick Carter attended to this detail, and then, accompanied by Chick, started for the glass house of the murder.

As Chick had intimated, the conservatory was the last portion of the old Washington Square mansion, it had been added as a sort of afterthought. The main hall, leading from the front street entrance, opened upon a short vestibule. This, in turn, held two doors; one led to the conservatory, the other to a yard, with side entrance and areaway for delivery. The little yard was tastefully arranged, hedged in and frowned upon by bare, blank, windowless brick walls. The yard was shut off by a high iron fence with impressive gateway, generally kept locked. To scale this fence would have been an extraordinarily difficult task, especially in view of the fact that it fronted upon an open area, generally filled with commonplace traffic. There was no door from the yard to the conservatory, whatever. The only means of entrance was by way of the house door.

So much for the exterior.

Within, the place was far more enthralling. Winton, with much money to spend, had fitted out the glass house lavishly indeed. There were three rows of flower racks, built up from the floor, upon cement standards. Long boxes held blooming flowers of the rarest and most expensive character. Orchids festooned their unhealthy colors from swinging baskets overhead, and the profusion of ferns seemed without end.

The moment Nick Carter stepped through the house door to the room, he was well nigh suffocated by the warmth and the luxurious breath of tropical incense. It was a dead scent, pregnant with rose and lilac and fantastically tinted blooms, rarely seen by the ordinary, everyday eye.

"Where is the body, Chick?" the detective inquired, with lowered voice.

"I will show you, Nick."

"What a spot for a crime!"

"Rather well-selected, I think."

"What, here!"

"Look for yourself, Nick."

And Nick Carter never quite forgot that first glimpse. He had passed down two rows of flowers and ferns, raised a foot or so above the ground or floor of the conservatory. They had reached the end of the glass house, but a large, cask-like arrangement, containing a perfectly enormous spraying fern, blocked this section of the passage. Between it, and the glass-paneled end of the conservatory, there must have been a narrow space.

Into this space, the figure of a woman was crowded.

It was attired in a loose-fitting house gown of exquisite material, light lilac, but crumpled and crowded about the body. Two red slippered feet were to be seen, one just brushing the side of the fern cask. Chick and the detective discussed the situation rather calmly, after Nick Carter had made his usual and well-defined investigations. Their conversation was a reflection of what each thought and of the conditions as they existed, and we give, it, very properly, in detail, exactly as it transpired.

"From the position of the body, Chick," Carter declared, "I am very much inclined to believe that Miss Hollingsworth stumbled here by mistake."

"Why do you think so; I should judge that the body had been jammed down here, immediately following the crime."

"Impossible."

"Well, suppose we settle this question. Follow me, for a moment. Here we have a wicker chair. It is directly beneath the big Japanese fern midway to the door. There is a break in the foliage. Sunlight would reach this chair late in the afternoon. A very natural place for the young woman to be led, and where she might recline temporarily. Her hair, as you noticed, was unbound—it is still damp. She was drying it and while the maid suggested nothing of the sort, I think Miss Hollingsworth came here, primarily, to permit the sun to dry that hair. Let us suppose she was led, blindfolded, to the wicker chair, here. She made herself most comfortable."

"But this is all supposition, Nick."

"On the contrary, it is very likely true. Please accept this glass and study the wicker chair. We find three things are true, Chick: First, one portion of the back of the chair is stained, just a wee bit, there is a scent of bayrum or some other hair tonic. Miss Estelle rested her head just there. The hair fell backward, over the chair and the sunlight, with this western exposure, could reach it."

"I see the marks."

"Of course you do. Now, to continue. I have picked at least three or four loose strands of hair from the wicker chair and the floor. You did not see the comb, did you. It lies on the damp soil to the rear of the chair, just where the young woman dropped it."

Chick noted, for the first time, a short bone comb.

It was lying on the edge of a box of soil behind the wicker chair.

"Miss Hollingsworth must have fallen asleep," Nick Carter continued. "She was asleep for quite some time, in the same position."

"I can't figure that out, Nick."

"Have you looked at the sand path between these

two rows of flower racks, especially here in front of the chair occupied by the girl?"

"My observations have been of a minor character, Nick, as you must appreciate."

"Note the indentations in the sand, compact in circular pads. Miss Estelle stretched herself out rather freely, her heels only touched the path, and they remained in one position for quite some time. In arising, finally, she did so with a start. She evidently realized that it was quite late, that it may have been dark outside, or approaching it. Her toes struck the sand next, and the heel prints were not disturbed."

"Yes, Nick, I see it now."

"Good, what do we find? Come, get down on your hands and knees as I have done. Miss Hollingsworth wore a peculiar type of red slipper, Japanese, I believe. The heels are triangular. We find the rather soft pressure of these heels, wavering from side to side, along the sand path, down there."

"Yes."

"That she was still bandaged, and intuitively felt the change of light, we must imagine. She was trying to find her way to the house door, without removing the bandage over her eyes. She groped, I know, and her hands were outstretched for support because I have found several of these rose plants injured, a leaf snatched off or a petal brushed out of kilter. The fern tub there, stands in the centre of the walk. She stumbled against it and fell across, beneath the ferns, landing back of the tub. Come, look for yourself, I want you to verify my observations."

"But she could have seen for herself if she wanted to; the girl is not blind, and never was. The bandage was simply to temporarily protect her eyes."

"I believe that she dreaded removing that bandage. Her physician had doubtless instructed her to the contrary."

"A rather remarkable fall, Nick."

"Granted, but still I see the possibilities of it. One of the red slippered feet still rests on the far side of the tub."

"Perhaps you are correct."

"I am very positive, Chick."

"Still, if she had fallen of her own free will and accord, if I may put it that way, parts of her dressing gown would have remained across the earth of the tub. She appears to be squeezed down beyond it, scot free."

"I believe that the body was pulled into that position."

"But there is no room on the other side of the tub."

"There are glass squares."

"I know that."

"And one of them was removed for the consummation of this crime."

"This was premeditated, then?"

"I think so."

"We can soon find out by examining the glass, say from the outside."

"I did that when we were in the yard."

"And you found——"

"That there was little or no putty, just the tin triangles. They had been removed and replaced. A square of glass had been taken from its position for a time, then replaced."

"And the stabbing?"

"Accomplished through that small opening."

"Did you note the position of the wound?"

"Again my theory proves it's own worth. The knife—it was a dagger—was awkwardly thrust. It did not strike a vital point at first, it was twisted, redrawn and thrust again, with unusual strength."

"Which made it all the more horrible, as I told you."

"Precisely."

"Then the death hand reached through the square panel?"

"Yes, and that hand was sadly annoyed by conditions, else the blow would have been fatal the first time."

"It eventually struck the heart?"

"Yes."

"You will admit, Nick, that the crime is one extraordinarily cruel and ghastly?"

"It is pathetic."

"Then, as I follow you, some one from the outside noted the inanimate figure lying near the glass?"

"They did."

"Miss Hollingsworth was obviously striken insensible by her fall. The glass permitted of a clear view. Then the pane was removed."

"And the blow struck."

"A cowardly piece of business."

"There is no adequate name for it."

"Well what have you to say—what have you to think, Nick?"

The detective walked back to the wicker chair and sank into it, for he was weary and fatigued, mopping his brow with his handkerchief.

"Chick," he declared solemnly, "there is where you get me. I have looked over the ground well; brought to play all my secret methods of deduction and investigation, but it looks like a case without a clue. I am puzzled."

CHAPTER VI.

MR. VIGNAUX, OF THE VINEYARDS.

Clever minds worked over the Hollingsworth mystery that night, until pale, emaciated dawn straggled over the iron fencing and seeped into the glass conservatory, yet Nick Carter's opinion was only the more verified and emphasized.

Nothing material was discovered.

Police and detectives alike worked on and on in the dark. They studied the ground hungrily, for the case was destined to be a most important one, with millionaires behind it, yet that glass room gave forth no single item of vital interest.

A dagger had finally reached Miss Hollingsworth's

heart, through the loose folds of her lilac dressing gown. Death had been practically instantaneous. There was not a drop of blood at any other floor space of the conservatory. No knife was found. Most mystifying of all, just outside the conservatory lay a strip of damp earth, watered daily. It had been lately planted in seed. Neither here nor along the walks to the gate could the trace of a footstep be discovered although it seemed certain that any one reaching through the opening in the grass would have left some positive marks.

Yet there were none.

Even the walks were of white sand. A shoe print would have been immediately discernible. Investigation went to show that no one had had occasion to enter the rear yard for five days. There were no bits of lint or cloth along the iron bars of the fence or gate. As far as critical observation could figure it, the courtyard had not been visited by a single living soul.

Hector, a butler in charge of the gate, still held the key. There was only one key, and it had not been out of his possession. Closely questioned, he insisted that he had not opened the gate for the period already stated.

Yet Nick Carter knew, although he did not divulge the fact, that a square of glass, next to the damp earth, had been removed from its wooden frame.

No mention of this, by the police, had been made. He did not know that they were aware of it, and he said nothing.

The household, as was only natural, swayed under a tumult of various emotions. The full news of the tragedy had reached the servants' quarters, but a police guard had been placed there, due to strict instructions from the district attorney's office. Mr. Winton's personal standing in the community gave the case a significance that it might not otherwise have attained.

Nick saw Winton for a few moments only. The family physician had made arrangements to remain with him until morning, for he was in a serious nervous condition; and absolutely refused to be reconciled. The detective talked with him, and the answers he received were perfectly rational.

"You know Mr. Hollingsworth very well, sir?" he inquired.

"I should say I do, Carter."

"Did you know him in California?"

"I did. The 'Major', as they call him out there, is a fine gentleman. He has many moneyed interests."

"Did he have any enemies that you are aware of?"

"Absolutely none; I recall, last year, he had some small difficulties over a certain piece of property. He bought a piece of property used for grape raising and fired all the workers, but it was only a legitimate transaction."

"He 'fired' the old workers at the vineyards?"

"Yes, there had been murder and crime on the slopes. He changed the policy. The yearly output was consumed by a bottling concern making grape juice and cheap red wine."

"Who did he put in charge?"

"I think he told me, not later than yesterday, that it was a certain Mr. Vignaux."

"No more trouble?"

"He told me that things were progressing smoothly."

"You never heard him mention anything relative to any foes his daughter might have?"

"That would be foolish, sir. She was a graceful, afflicted, lovable child."

"You have no explanation for the murder?"

"None whatever."

A knowing nod from the physician gave him enough to the detective at this juncture, and he left the room, for he could see that Winton was suffering from those wild nerves of his. The slightest excitement invariably affected him.

For a moment after that, Nick Carter and Chick were together again.

"You saw the breakfast room and the silver chest?" the detective inquired.

"Mr. Winton took me everywhere."

"What was your impression?"

"I think François got away with the goods; there can be little doubt of that. First, I looked over his room. He was quiet and reserved and had a small room to himself. There was nothing of value in it. He had packed up all that he cared about and carried the stuff away, leaving no letters, no cards, nothing but a comparatively bare room."

"What was his reputation?"

"Good."

"Among the other servants."

"They all seemed to like him, so far as I could follow their remarks. Not one word against him was spoken."

"And the chest."

"You can walk across and see it for yourself, but there is nothing to see. It is in the breakfast room down the hall. A plain but heavy wooden chest, with a padlock. The lock had been broken, nothing more, and all articles of any value removed."

"No clues in the room?"

"Not one, Nick, and I certainly looked."

"Since the robbery and the disappearance, another item has cropped up. Winton was commanded to be at a certain Italian restaurant up the way. Then he was told to call at a certain house in the Old French Quarter to-morrow, under penalty—well, it sounded like a threat all the way through."

"I'll bet you've found that house, Nick?"

"I have, Chick. It is called the House of the Yellow Door."

"Anything doing?"

"So far, nothing."

"Do you associate the murder of Miss Hollingsworth with François, the House with the Yellow Door and the other accessories of this case?"

"Chick, I would not venture a guess just now, please do not ask me."

They were standing in the lower hall, not far from the front door. Some one was just arriving outside, and as that hour was not one notable for callers, save for the police, Nick could give a shrewd guess as to the party's identity.

"I think it must be poor Hollingsworth," Nick Carter suggested, turning.

"And he doesn't know," Chick added apprehensively.

A big red auto had drawn up, noisily without, at the curb. Two men entered the vestibule. One, a tall, erect gentleman, white of hair and ruddy of countenance. This was Hollingsworth, from Winton's previous description. The other, short and squat and heavy of jowls, with a two hundred pound avoirdupois, seemed a total stranger, and, at the moment, there appeared no excuse for his presence. Nick Carter was fortunate enough to engage these gentlemen upon their first appearance. The duty he felt he had to perform was not an agreeable one, but it had its advantages, after all.

They were immediately piloted to Mr. Winton's private first-floor office by the detective.

"I believe I have the pleasure of meeting Mr. Hollingsworth," Carter began, as the two eyed him with undeniable suspicion.

And Nick's guess was correct.

The man with the white hair bowed austerely and threw aside his hat and light coat.

The third of that important trio shifted from chair to chair until he found one that exactly suited him. It was in a far corner and away from the light. He had a black pointed beard and while dignified of bearing, seemed strangely ill at ease in the magnificently appointed room of the Washington Square magnate.

"I do not believe that I have the pleasure of your acquaintance," Hollingsworth remarked; he had imbibed some wine during the evening as Nick could readily discern.

"I happen to be one of Mr. Winton's personal friends, sir," the detective continued, fearful of his task, "I intervene, because—well, because it is my duty."

Still Hollingsworth could not appreciate the situation, and Nick, in as few words as possible, each one of which was selected with extreme care, stated the exact situation. The effect upon the father was one that might well be expected. For ten minutes there was no such thing as sympathy or consolation. The calm, deliberate white-haired Californian became a maniac, raging up and down the room, weeping like a child.

His companion appeared to take it more calmly, and Nick Carter had been watching him.

That twenty minutes was sickening, discouraging, deadly. The grief of the parent overshadowed everything else. It was just such scenes as this that made Nick Carter dread his own profession. He could stand many exigencies but the pathos of a broken heart overpowered him and set his nerves tingling like so many sensitive spun-wire webs under a flash of lightning.

At last Hollingsworth managed to control himself. It was with the greatest final difficulty, however, for he was prone to dash for the closed office door, between each sentence.

The finale of that interview left Nick Carter still in a tangle.

Hollingsworth could see no reason, find no reason, imagine no reason why his daughter should have fallen at the hands of a murderer. She was a comparative stranger to New York. She knew only the Winton household. Her physician was her sole comfort. It remained as baffling as before.

The stranger proved to be Mr. Vignaux, of the California districts. Hollingsworth explained all this in a final introduction. Vignaux had happened on suddenly and unexpectedly, following his employer to New York. There was still some lingering trouble at the vineyards. One hundred men had stopped work. It was a climax, and he had thought it best to see Hollingsworth immediately. There had been telegrams at first, and then Vignaux hurried on, and they had met, quite by accident, after the banquet. Hollingsworth had insisted that his assistant run up to Washington Square despite the late hour. There were extra rooms and Vignaux had only arrived three hours before. He could spend his night at the mansion and new plans would be arranged for the morrow. Through the entire interview, brief and troubled as it was, Nick Carter had noticed one important fact: the Frenchman—and he was surely that—Vignaux, accepted the story as a matter of almost absolute unconcern. At no period did he display the slightest emotion or unusual concern.

With his head thumping and his brain reeling, from the immensity and worry of it all, Nick Carter, fifteen minutes later, found Chick, who was seated on the front stoop, holding his head in his hands and talking with a central office man.

"I say, Chick."

"Yes."

"Just a minute."

"Anything new?"

"I'm off for home, now, really tired out."

"Any instructions?"

"I should say so. I need the sleep. I've seen you dozing on that red sofa in the back room ever since the Hep-Warder case. I guess it's up to you, Chick. I want you to stay right here to meet the coroner. In any event, I have a more specific reason for keeping tabs."

"What is that?"

"You were in the lower hall, back there, when Hollingsworth entered?"

"I was."

"You saw the man with him?"

"The dark-skinned gent."

"Yes. That is Vignaux, a Californian. He came all the way from the home vineyards to fuss over a strike out there. I do not like his looks. I want him watched."

"Will he stay here to-night? He went upstairs with Hollingsworth a few minutes ago. I guess they will see Winton."

"Don't lose track of Vignaux."

"Enough said, Chick."

"Good night."

"Good night, Nick."

Whisked home in his machine, the detective welcomed the thought of rest; the night had been extraordinarily strenuous, for more reasons than one. It was almost full morning and carts rattled past the swiftly speeding auto as it hastened in the direction of Madison Avenue.

But the events of that span of time were not to be closed; the page not yet to be completed. Carter had not been in bed two minutes when the telephone bell rang in Nick's private office, and Joseph soft-shoed it down the hall, in sandals.

"Mr. Carter," he called from beyond the closed door.

"Yes, Joseph."

"Wanted on the phone again."

"Who is it?"

"Mr. Chickering."

Carter sprang from the bed. He did not even stop to slip on his robe, but hastened to the wire, keen, alert, excited, his brain more active than ever before.

"Well, what now, Chick?"

"I want to know what to do."

"Yes, where are you?"

"Still at the house."

"But——"

"But, nothing. You asked me to keep an eye on Vignaux. He is just leaving the mansion. I caught him slipping on his coat and hat and stealing out, as if he didn't want to be watched. Shall I leave here and get on the trail?"

Nick Carter's words must have snapped with electrical intensity over the wire.

"You bet, Chick, don't lose him for a second," he answered.

CHAPTER VII.

FRANÇOIS ANSWERS A QUESTION.

It was rather late when Nick Carter stirred from his rest. It had been richly deserved, and he knew he would be compelled to face the papers of the latest issue, brimming with exaggerated accounts of the famous Washington Square murder mystery. Joseph, as was his usual custom, brought up four of the morning editions and spread them out, placing a tray, containing tea and toast, on a chair beside the bed.

Carter was just beginning to enter into the details of the murder, as the press sees it when Joseph again appeared.

"You are wanted, sir."

"Have you a card, Joseph?"

"No, sir, the gentleman said he knows you. He gave his name—its Mr. Hollingsworth, I think, if I caught it correctly."

"I think you did. Conduct Mr. Hollingsworth to my office. I shall be down immediately. What time is it, anyway, Joseph? Look at my watch over there."

"A quarter to twelve, sir."

"And you let me sleep that long?"

"Usually, sir, if you have anything important, it hangs on your mind and you waken of your own accord. You looked tired last night or rather this morning, sir. I thought I'd let you sleep."

"Tell the gentleman I will be down immediately. Give him any one of the current magazines—or, better still—these papers."

"He has a bundle of them already, sir, more than you have."

"All right."

It was with some surprise that the detective entered his office, to greet the California land king. He found a hollow-eyed man awaiting him, worn and tired and haggard.

"Mr. Carter."

"Oh, you remember me from last evening?"

"I never forget a face, sir."

"This visit is rather unexpected."

"I have talked with Winton."

"And what did he say?"

"From what he told me, I resolved to call upon you."

"Has Mr. Winton his suspicions, relative to the murder of your daughter?"

"I think he has. He told me this morning, for the first, the full details of the strange disappearance of his old servant, François LeJeune, and, also, of the strange correspondence immediately following it; Mr. Carter, it is understood that you are already working on the case for my friend Winton; I want you to find the murderer of my daughter."

"I have already resolved to take the case."

"What!"

"Yes, Mr. Hollingsworth. My mind was made up the very second I looked upon your daughter's body. I shall run down the criminal so sure as there is one. My interest is positively sincere."

"And this François."

"It looks as if he had nothing to do with the affair. Mr. Winton might be excused, however, for being suspicious."

"You in no wise connect LeJeune with the murder?"

"No."

"As you must realize, Mr. Carter, I am very much upset, quite heartbroken. I am only thankful that I should so suddenly meet the talent most needed at a critical juncture. There is Vignaux. I scarcely know

what I should do without him. His visit has proven opportune."

"Is Mr. Vignaux a competent man?"

"I have no reason to doubt his ability."

"Last night, where did Mr. Vignaux go?"

"To the room appointed."

"Did he remain there during the early morning hours?"

"I naturally suppose so, Mr. Carter. Why do you ask?"

"I have a reason for so doing. When did you last see your assistant?"

"I have not seen him since we parted and he went to his room."

"Then he was not at the mansion up to the time of your leaving to come here?"

"I was told that he was not in."

"You do not know where he might be, at this moment?"

"Attending to business, unquestionably. He was to help me with certain police details. I want to see the district attorney personally; I must have an interview."

"Did Mr. Vignaux go to the district attorney's office?"

"He may have gone there. On the other hand, he may have sent several important telegrams home. The vineyards, you know—the men out on strike."

"I see, I see."

And Nick Carter was running over in his mind, the last phone word from Chick. Mr. Vignaux had slipped from the Winton mansion before dawn, Chick on the trail. The case was progressing as Nick Carter hoped it should, neatly.

"Mr. Carter," Hollingsworth eventually resumed, "from a professional view-point, does not this terrible catastrophe contain an unusual number of baffling turns?"

"To what do you refer?"

"The ghastly stabbing of my child, and in such a way—such a way. She knew next to no one here, she had no enemies, she was as harmless and as innocent as a child. I can conceive no reason, nothing to instigate or excuse the terrible affair."

"The murder of Estelle Hollingsworth does not have, for its centre of reasoning, this city, nor this section of the country, my dear sir."

"Please explain—I——"

"California."

"What, you mean that——"

"I mean, sir, that in your own sunny country, somewhere, from the slopes of the wonderful vineyards of California, emanates the reason, as you call it, for this murder."

Hollingsworth started from his chair.

"She had no enemies there."

"I do not care to further discuss the question now," the detective ended.

The troubled father took his departure with bent head, made a tottering old man, in twenty-four hours.

No sooner had the front door closed than Nick Carter became unduly animated.

Impassive Joseph was attentive, and within instant call, as the detective worked before a set of three mirrors. It was not often that Nick felt the need of a disguise, but the hour called with its own secret, peculiar demand, and he was ready to answer with an art, wonderfully if not marvelously perfected. Before him, as he labored, stood a picture, a portrait, in a small oval frame; it was the speaking likeness of Mr. Winton, said cabinet having been presented to the detective at the time of the Dodge-LeCart mystery, upon which case Carter had been of vast assistance to Winton, in the recovery of stolen bonds.

He was making up as Winton. Fortunately, the two men were of the same general build. Nick's broad shoulders were impossible to conceal, yet, when he was finished, what with padding here, pulling down there, and adjusting certain linings, he had imitated the build of the other to a surprising degree. There was the high silk hat, the middle-aged cut of the neatly tailored suit, the lines of worry beneath the eyes, wrinkled and dark, the strangely slanting nose and the extraordinary, bush brows, all topped off with what might have been Winton's own eyeglasses.

"Joseph," Carter suddenly remarked, as he put on the finishing touches, "I want you to have Bobby and his hack waiting for me in front of Winton's Washington Square house at eight o'clock to the dot. Tell Bobby the matter is of vital importance, that he is to come armed and ready for trouble."

"Yes, sir."

"And, Joseph—just a moment. Get Winton on the phone."

Silently the man obeyed.

"Is this you, Winton?"

"Yes," sounded a quivering voice.

"This is Carter. You have not been out of the house this morning, have you?"

"No, how could I? I am a nervous wreck."

"I want to ask you to remain in until I arrive. I will be right down. Do not even sit near a street window."

"What in the world is——"

"I will be right down."

"I can never understand your actions, Carter," Winton exclaimed, after the first surprise of seeing himself duplicated so cleverly, had worn off, "are you in earnest when you say that you intend to keep that engagement at the House of the Yellow Door?"

"I most assuredly am."

"No time was mentioned on the card."

"I have good reasons for making it somewhere in the neighborhood of nine o'clock. Let me again warn you to keep out of sight. Answer no phone calls; keep in this room. Warn your butler to permit no one to enter. I will raise the ban early enough, I think."

"But I am afraid to have you undertake this, Carter, they might kill you down there, and from your

description, the section at night is not safe for a decent citizen."

"I shall take care of that," and Carter smiled.

Before leaving—and the afternoon had been slowly but surely advancing, Nick Carter rummaged around again in the room of the servant, François. He took something from a corner drawer and tucked it away carefully, a dim, old-fashioned portrait, photographed and reproduced on an ivory oval. It had doubtless been forgotten in the hurried flight, for Carter discovered it still in the envelope where it had first met his gaze, upon his initial search of the premises.

Bobby, a grizzled and typical night hawk of the old school, had drawn his quaint rig up in front of the house a few minutes before eight, showing that the silent Joseph was just as thorough and as painstaking as ever. Driving whiffs of mist were blowing across the Square and the night had fallen, wet, soggy, rainy and disagreeable.

That he might be watched, Nick Carter expected and appreciated. He opened the front door, shut it and with Winton's nervous, quick stride, hurried down the steps and jumped into the cab. Bobby had been given his instructions and asked no questions.

More than once, Nick Carter had depended upon him, and Bobby knew where the yellow backs came from with unfailing regularity.

At twenty-one minutes of nine, a ramshackle cab picked its way through a maze of shifting fruit carts, sniffling children and the rough element of the Old French Quarter, turned up Minetta Street and thence to the lane, wheels rimmed with mud, windows splashed and sparkling. It finally came to a halt in the gloom of the narrow way, Bobby dropped clumsily from his seat and opened the door, to permit an aged, trembling man to alight, leaning on his cane. His coat collar was upturned to protect his face from the mist and dampness, and his glasses were dewy from the night.

"You will please wait for me, until I return," Mr. Winton's double wheezed, coughing and stepping in the direction of the yellow door, "I trust that I will not be long."

"Gee," thought Bobby, "Mr. Carter sure is in bad down Minetta way. Wonder what's up; I'll bet he rakes in the fuzzy ones, all right."

It may be imagined that the detective felt a thrill of interest and curiosity, as he knocked impatiently at the door. It was a dangerous proceeding, this business of bearding so many lions in such a den, especially as he was by no means sure of the character of the fraternity, now working from that rendezvous.

One of the green shutters at the dark windows above clicked, as it was opened a mere trifle. It softly went shut again, but not before Nick Carter had spotted the incident.

"They want to make sure," he grunted.

There was the customary rattling of a heavy chain, and the ceremony incident to unbarring and unfastening a door that was not open to every one.

Nick Carter recognized the face at the partially opened portal. It was Pierre Girardin, the same Pierre of the Belvedere, on West Third Street, the companion of the French girl who had tempestuously exposed Nick Carter to the occupants of the hole.

"Come in, sir, come on in," Gerardin growled, hoarsely. He was in a pair of old slippers, and his red shirt was open at the throat, showing a long, ugly scar.

"I do not like to enter here, I do not," the supposed Winton faltered, "I—I—would rather not. Can't this business or whatever you want of me be transacted elsewhere?"

"Oh, come on in," Pierre complained, peevishly, and he half pulled Nick inward, banging the door behind him.

The hall was draughty and dismally dark. Nick was led along by the arm.

"Where am I being taken?" the supposed Winton whined.

"You'll see, soon enough."

"I will have the police upon you, if I am injured in any way, I should not have consented to keep this silly engagement."

"It's a mighty lucky thing for you, you did."

"But, what do you want with me."

"You can wait a minute, can't you. Come in here," and Pierre opened a door with his free hand.

It opened into a room to the rear of the old house, and, while only half-lighted by an oil lamp on a centre table, Carter could distinguish fittings of a unique order. The woodwork was grim, and old and shabby. The ceiling had been canopied over by a piece of rich, maroon cloth, fringed and be-tasseled. Here, at least, the new tenant, Marie Felix, had exercised her fine French hand.

One other person occupied that room. Nick Carter could guess who it was immediately, for he had thoroughly questioned Winton on the topic. François Le-Juene, Winton's one-time trusted servant, was now a pitiful sight to gaze upon. He crouched in a chair, as far away from the light as he could get; his features drawn and pinched and his old eyes bloodshot.

As Nick Carter was thrust into the room, François looked up, uttered a sharp cry, and groveled at his feet.

"Please, please be merciful, Mr. Winton," he sobbed.

Pierre roughly seized him, throwing him back into his chair again.

"Will you do it, will you?" the big Frenchman hissed; threatening the other with a clenched fist. "Go on, loosen up that old tongue of yours."

"Yes, I—I—must," was the aged servant's retort, his teeth chattering, and, with bowed head, he approached Nick Carter.

CHAPTER VIII.

ENTER—THE KING-PIN.

"That is my servant, François," Winton's double exclaimed, stamping the floor and pounding with his cane. "I have questions to ask him, too. What did you mean sir, by stealing from my house after what I had done—you—you ingrate——"

"Stop, *sir*," old François mumbled, between his sobs, "it is not true, I——"

"Cut that out," Pierre exclaimed, "remember what we said. This sort of thing can't go on. Ask him."

François' entire body quivered and vibrated.

He brushed his face and eyes several times with a thin, emaciated hand.

Then he looked up, straight forward, with two faded, yet penetrating black eyes—he was looking at Winton, and Nick Carter winced under that gaze. If any one would know his own master, it would be old François.

A change swept LeJuene. He gasped, his fingers rambled to his lips, nagging at them, his face was shot with a sudden ray of happiness and intelligence.

"No—no!" he cried.

"Won't you? *diable!*"

Pierre jumped forward, catching the man by the throat.

"You must not do that, wait until I talk with him," Nick Carter called, raising his cane threateningly.

"I want no more trouble from you," Pierre growled shaking the servant, and apparently disregarding Winton, "let's have this settled, or, *sacre*, I'll kill you."

François appeared to have recovered himself.

"That man—that," he gasped, "is *not* my master!"

Nick Carter's worst expectations were realized in a deadly fashion. Fate had worked with fiendish cleverness, tangling his skein. Of all persons he should not have met in that house was François LeJuene, the family servant.

"Are you crazy, eh, crazy?" Pierre insisted.

"I am quite sane."

"Do you mean to say that this person is not Winton?"

"He is no more my master than you."

"François," broke in the detective, "François, you are not yourself. For all you know, I have come here to assist you, despite the fact that you have played false to your trust. He is indeed crazed," Carter added, in an aside, unflinchingly meeting the suspicious gaze of Pierre, who was wavering between doubt and conviction. The French bully and ex-convict turned his attention to the servant.

"What more have you to say?" he asked, slowly and with emphasis.

"It is not Mr. Winton. I know, why shouldn't I know. Was I not raised under that roof, did I not accompany him to this miserable country, do I not dress him and care for his every want. I insist that there is a mistake. This person is an impostor."

"What proof have you?"

Pierre was suddenly alarmed.

"In many ways. The voice—the eyes—everything."

"And you just noticed it?"

"I knew when I had a good look—I tell you I knew."

François returned to his corner, mumbling and grunting, his head moving from side to side, as he occasionally looked backward to the detective, standing a few feet from the table and the lamp.

Nick Carter took matters boldly in hand on the instant.

"You must not mind what this poor man says," he declared to Pierre, "for years he has not been all that he should; a little bit wrong here; it came from brooding. I will gladly forgive him for what he has done, if he will return the silverware, nothing more need be said; the police shall be removed from the case, and all inquiries will end—even François may come back. I love him for what he was, for what he has been back through the trying years."

"It is a lie," François shouted.

"Be quiet, take our advice," Carter said.

Yet Pierre was far from satisfied. On the other hand, Nick confessed to a puzzling state of mind. What had Pierre wanted to make the old servant ask of his master? Why all this mysterious play and counterplay?

One of the room doors opened at this rather embarrassing moment and a woman entered. She was carelessly dressed and middle aged, with features smooth and still beautiful.

"Marie Felix," the detective immediately thought. She took in the room and its three excited occupants in one grand sweep of her sparkling eyes.

"What has happened?" she inquired of Pierre, with a shrug of the shoulders and a trifling accent.

"Didn't you hear?" Girardin asked.

"I have heard nothing."

"François declares that this is not Winton at all—that we have been deceived. He will not speak another word, beyond this statement."

With never a glance at the detective, Marie strode across to LeJuene's chair in the corner.

"François," she said, in a low voice.

"Yes."

"What are you saying?"

"The man lies, he is not my master."

"Are you very sure. Is this not a trick to thwart us and to make possible your refusal to do as we command?"

"I would swear to it."

"Remember, if there is trickery, you know what we can do?"

"The saints help me, I do. I would not tell an untruth. It is not Mr. Winton at all."

Marie Felix appeared satisfied.

She walked to the side wall and rapped smartly, two or three times, upon its drab plaster.

Almost at the same second, the door through which she had entered was flung open, and two men came in

to do her bidding. One was the besotted father of the little French flower girl—the same Carter had first met in the café on Bleecker Street. The other man Nick Carter had never seen before. They were both dressed in a slovenly fashion and appeared to be of a desperate, calculating type.

Nick did not like the situation.

Still, he never so much as turned a lash, or suggested, beneath his make-up as Winton, the remotest fear or nervousness. The mere fact that in that one room, four criminals and François, stood ready to put up the fight of their lives, should the old servant prove correct, failed to impress Nick Carter as it might a man less equipped to attend to his own safety. Beneath the solemn garb and the wrinkled face of the supposed magnate, lurked power, mentality and reserve energy, almost unlimited.

"Attend to him; see that he is searched," Marie ordered, coolly, and she suggested the tigress, her proud head thrown back, her graceful arms never still for a second, "we shall see what we shall see of this matter. Perhaps François is right. There is not a way of telling if we blind ourselves. You know what Constantina told us, Pierre. That meeting in the basement. Nick Carter is on this case. He is very wise and very powerful. Precaution is necessary."

"The little French girl must be that woman's daughter—they look alike," Nick ruminated, "the web is being spun most interestingly. Who shall I see next?"

"Tell Constantina to come to me," the French tigress now called, and Pierre left the room.

With no suspicious sign, Nick had slowly backed, until he felt the side wall at his shoulder blades. While prepared for the worst, he did not deem it prudent to make any show of opposition just then. What would the daughter have to say? Would she, like François, penetrate his clever disguise? It was not probable.

Constantina Felix, dull of eye and showing the effects of her careless mode of living in the section, was escorted to the room by her friend, Pierre.

She yawned and appeared much bored.

"Now remove his hat, coat and glasses."

This from the woman whose occupancy of the House of the Yellow Door, had brought a strange factor to the quarter.

"I will gladly relieve you of that trouble, my dear madam," Nick Carter said, taking off his high silk hat and dropping it to the floor "that this is an outrage, we shall not mention; let it suffice that you have drawn me here by force, and I must submit as gracefully as I may."

With a certain dignity, the detective removed his long black coat. He even went so far as to loosen his collar and draw aside the little black bow tie. His glasses he pushed into his vest pocket. François had been watching this with the greatest possible eagerness and interest. And Carter; Carter was working a double game. Nothing could have pleased him more. He stood a good square fighting chance with no long coat to hamper his arms, and the secret pockets containing his shooting irons. That was why he had conceded so willingly, though his make-up was sadly depleted, for these accessories count.

"Will that suffice; I trust so?" he pleaded.

His actions were studied. He gave the impression of a man of the world, bowed with care and anxiety, and frightful lest those around him attempt some dastardly trick.

"No, not yet," smiled the purring Marie.

"Shall I run through his things?" Pierre asked eagerly.

"Yes, the coat first," the woman answered.

"Only a few papers—and——"

Pierre held up a small, ivory oval.

"A photograph," he finished.

François LeJeune was still watching with all-seeing orbs. A cry came from him, a quick, wild cry.

"Give that to me," he shrieked.

"Is it yours?" the woman inquired.

"It is the picture of my sainted father."

He snatched for it, but Pierre would not deliver it into his hands.

"This is your father's photograph?" Marie continued.

"It is, praise to his name."

Nick Carter's eyes twinkled. The little ivory miniature was destined to play a more vital part in the proceedings than he had anticipated. He had wished to present it to François, when he ran across him, in quite a different way, but fate seemed to will otherwise.

"How should this man, whom you say is not Mr. Winton, be in possession of the picture?" Marie added, coldly.

François was obviously embarrassed. He did not know exactly what to say.

The tenants of the House of the Yellow Door were not favorably impressed by the old servant's unmistakable hesitancy in answering. Perhaps they had never placed as much confidence in François as they should.

"Gentlemen, and you, madam," the supposed Winton declared, "I wish you to hear me. The photograph is evidence of my identity, I think. I found it, where I knew it to be, in my servant's room. I knew that François loved the portrait of his father. It was almost a sacred shrine to him. I brought it along with me, have carried it since the disappearance of the man, knowing that if I could allow François to see it, I might arouse his dormant better self, an appeal, through the memory of the dead, would accomplish more than anything else."

The circle of faces in the gloomy little apartment was a study. In the ghastly silence, the rain could be heard splashing against the windows of the room.

And just then the side door opened, with scarcely a sound.

The door was as softly and mechanically closed

again, and a man stood there, back to it, frowning upon the little group.

"Vignaux," Nick Carter muttered, "I am beginning to understand. Our case is not so complicated, after all."

CHAPTER IX.

PATSY DOES A GOOD TURN.

In that small, queerly furnished room, Nick Carter knew there was collected, for a moment, perhaps the most dangerous combination of criminals that existed in New York.

And he was pitted against them all.

It was indeed an hour of peril and suspense.

Marie, the woman, was the first to break the silence. François sobbed and sniffled in his corner, like a broken child.

"I am glad you are here," Marie said warmly, "we have expected you. A strange complication has arisen. You can settle it, once and for all. Constantina is not herself. Something has come over the girl. Who is this man; look carefully at him? Is this Winton, or not?"

"Winton is at home; this cannot be the genuine article, I am afraid, Marie."

The portly Vignaux smiled, showing his white teeth.

"You are positive?"

"I know that Winton is seriously ill. He could not have reached here without complicating his condition. He is a nervous shadow of himself."

"But do you know, absolutely?"

"I do; this person is not your man."

"So François declares."

"Then François is correct."

"Who, then, is our clever guest?"

"Let me look again, mamma," Constantina interrupted, stirring from her torpor. She ran up to within a foot of the composed detective and glared malignantly in his face.

"Scrub his face, Pierre," she ordered.

The Frenchman reached for a towel, dipped it in a dirty basin, and approached Nick Carter.

This was the final call, the ninth hour for Nick, and he knew it. With an inborn sense of wisdom and precaution, the detective weighed in the balance every possible way out of the difficulty. The doors were covered, there were no windows; it looked desperately hopeless viewed in the sickly yellow light of the oil lamp.

And yet there must be a way out.

Nick Carter invited the impossible, when it entered his daily professional duties. He figured, and very wisely, that accomplishing the easy is not glorious, nor inspiring. Then there was his massive strength of person. Muscle is a good stock in trade if directed properly by a clear brain.

Nick possessed both to an exaggerated degree.

As Pierre came at him, the detective understood the motive. Off must come his ingenious make-up, and the French girl would undoubtedly recognize him. Vignaux would also know, having conversed with Nick that evening in Winton's office.

The hand and wet towel were outstretched. Nick pumped out a quick fist, and the towel took another direction. It went, with a splattering thud, back into Pierre's ugly face, staggering and blinding him.

The two French roughs, near the table, and Vignaux sprang for the wall, a trio of indignant and alarmed rascals. With the first pair, Carter had no trouble whatever; ju-jutsu attended to that petty detail, and when they landed in the opposite corner, nursing nastily wrenched arms and feeling of cracked heads, they began to experience a growing respect for the man of medium height, coatless and hatless, whose muscles were not so readily apparent on the surface, but whose electric energy meant all that wonderful strength may produce. With Vignaux it was somewhat different. He was of heavy build, and when he lurched madly upon Nick, the detective was borne backward to the wall.

The little cat, Constantina, proved the fly in the ointment.

Carter could not look on all sides at once, for the two roughs were picking themselves up and drawing knives.

Constantina was clever in her way.

She had picked up the wet towel from where it had fallen, beside Pierre, thrown it open, and, with marvelous dexterity, brought it down in a soggy blind over the detective's head.

For the second, Nick Carter was shut off from the room, its occupants and the hundred perils that beset him. He snatched at the towel, yet it clung, in a wet mass, about his face, and nothing could have been more satisfactory to the rascals.

It placed Nick Carter, for that frightful minute, under a great disadvantage, and the one minute was his undoing.

Four of them set upon him and bore him kicking and struggling to the table. The lamp was lifted from the table, just in time to save it, and then a careless grip precipitated it to the floor, with a crash that must have been heard to the street.

Carter knew that lamp was lighted, and that it was an oil lamp.

There were scurrying, hurried sounds on all four sides, a woman cried aloud in terror, and something spun past the detective's head as he lay upon the table.

"Rope him down," Vignaux could be heard, puffing from his exertions.

A portion of the towel still cluttered Nick's view of things, and he could not remove it, for his hands were pinioned at his sides.

Pierre and the other two worked as they never

had before. To rope Nick Carter to that table was one of the greatest tasks it had ever been necessary for them to perform, and they did not accomplish it without several kicks and blows.

From darkness, the room became vividly, glaringly bright, as a tongue of fire sprang from behind the prostrate Nick. The flame emanated, no doubt, from the overturned lamp, and the detective was worried for the first time.

"Throw this over it! Quick, there, Pierre."

Again the room was in total darkness.

A door opened, shut again and opened. Marie Felix stood midway between portal and table, holding at arm's length a candle in a greasy holder.

Evidently, the dangerous lamp had been subdued by means of bed coverings, for it no longer gave out its intense illumination. Nick did not attempt to rock or to escape, principally because he knew it was quite useless.

Rope had been wound around his body, beginning at a point a little below his neck, and reaching to his feet. He could not budge. The table was a squat affair, well built, with ordinary, though heavy wooden top. Given a second to himself, undisturbed, Nick could have swung it over to the floor, by sheer force, but that opportunity did not come.

What did interest the detective, however, was a tapping, tapping beneath the very table upon which he reclined. It was as if some one was thumping with a single finger, nail foremost, on the bottom side of the boards.

It mystified Nick to a degree.

Tap, tap, tap.

There it was again.

Vignaux gave some quick, snappy directions. The two roughs left the room, and Pierre followed them a moment later, pulling the door shut. Apparently, there was "something up."

"Bring that light over here, will you, Marie?" Vignaux suggested, to the French woman, who, with startled eyes, was looking upon a smoking mass at one end of the table.

"I think this must be Carter," Vignaux went on.

He took the candle in his own hand. Dozens of grotesque shadows played along the fantastic walls. The room was very poorly lighted and the intensity of the single flame, as Vignaux held it close to Nick Carter's face, brought out every feature, every muscle, every dripping, wet fraction of grease paint and putty.

With a certain fiendish delight, the Frenchman saw a few drops of hot wax fall directly upon that face.

Nick never winced.

He suffered untold agonies, but he kept himself in perfect control.

Deliberately, Vignaux repeated the operation.

With a hot splash, a drop of the wax fell upon Nick Carter's cheek.

And still the tapping beneath the table continued.

"Anything to say?" the Frenchman declared mockingly.

"Nothing."

"Like the wax?"

Silence.

"Let François look at him," Marie Felix suggested. She was bending across the table and looking down into the upturned face. All the hatred possible, in a nature of that kind, was concentrated in the snapping, black eyes.

"Come here, François," Vignaux ordered.

There was a shuffling in one corner.

"Now do you know this man?"

François took a long, relieved look.

"No, sir."

"Never saw him before?"

"No, sir."

"It is certainly not Winton?"

"I have said that all along."

"But you can't place the person?"

"I cannot."

"Then you can go."

"Very well, sir."

The man sighed deeply, as if much relieved.

Nick Carter glared upward, somewhat dazzled by the candle. He was about to speak when—what was that, a touch, a wisp of a sensation on his right hand, which hung a little over the side of the table.

Some one had touched his hand and he could detect the pressure of two fingers—a pinch, a warning pinch.

The table concealed a friend.

An overpowering sense of gratitude and of thankfulness took possession of him. Patsy and Chick might possibly have reached the house. They might have entered in some secret way. Chick, the detective knew, had telephoned that he was following Vignaux. There was still hope.

"Are you Nicholas Carter?" Marie Felix said.

"Why should you want to know?"

Nick was killing time.

He might well do this, for an extraordinary thing had happened. The ropes ran the entire way around the table, therefore circling under it. Those ropes were loosening. Nick knew it, for he could feel them vibrate and stir.

"Will you answer the question?" Vignaux chipped in, tilting the candle and smiling cruelly.

"Yes," and Carter had, instantaneously, determined upon his method of procedure, "I am that very person."

The two rogues started.

For Nick, in his present condition, was not at once recognizable, and while the French woman did not know him by sight, Vignaux might have remembered the normal countenance.

With a cry of anger and rage, Marie Felix snatched the burning candle from her companion's hand. In another second, she had dashed it downward, full into the face of the prostrate detective.

CHAPTER X.

A RAPID-FIRE ESCAPE.

While slightly singed by the descending candle, as it glanced across his face, Nick Carter was not doomed to any tantalizing torture. A final nagging at his bonds and a last pinch of his dangling hand, and his body shot upward from the table, to the utter amazement of the two persons most concerned.

In the same breath, Patsy Garvan became a factor on the scene.

Patsy it was, grinning and armed with two revolvers, one in either hand, and he was flourishing them as if he enjoyed the situation immensely.

"Now for it, Mr. Carter."

"Get the door, Patsy."

This conversation, it should be appreciated, was taking place in total darkness. There had been a temporary flash of the candle, as it rolled across the floor before going out, and it was then that Nick Carter had witnessed Patsy with his guns.

Now the room was impenetrably black.

Nick wanted to head off the escape of the man and woman, but in this he was foiled. He heard Patsy make a dash for the other side of the room, but it was not accomplished with sufficient rapidity.

"Ouch."

"What is it, Patsy?"

"Got the edge of the door on my head."

"Open her up."

"Can't, locked on the outside, just heard the key turn."

Carter's small flashlight illuminated the room instantly. He felt for his own revolvers. They were safe.

"Now for the other door, the hall door."

He ran to it, pulled it open and hustled out, with his brave assistant at his back.

Here again it was gloomy and ill-smelling, yet the flash cut a clean streak of light down the filthy path.

"Want to get out, sir?"

"Guess we'd better, Patsy."

"I hate to do it, sir, honest I do. That is a fine nest of rascals back there. You can't beat it."

"There is a time for everything. I have discovered what I was out to learn, Patsy. They can't fool me now."

Nick had entered by this same passage and he remembered it. He swept aside the chain and bar and with a bound, both himself and Garvan were in the wet, dismal street.

The blinds of an upstairs window swung into the night at the same time.

Minetta Lane was brought into sudden picturesque relief by three shots from above, as a revolver was discharged in quick succession.

The aim had not been correct.

Bobby's old horse sprang forward, clattered up the cobbles, and Bobby, doubtless asleep on the seat, rolled down at the feet of Patsy and the detective, cursing a blue streak, from every point of the compass.

"Guess they nipped the nag," Patsy called.

"Chase him, Bobby," the detective warned, for the cab was bounding and bumping at a great rate, and the peculiar curves and angles of the street suggested disaster, if the horse was not soon quieted.

Fortunately, all of the shots went wild. Two or three curious men and women looked on, in surprise, as Nick and Patsy hurried, on a dogtrot, after Bobby.

The nag was finally stopped, before it had gone far, and the two sleuths climbed into the rig, Nick having instructed Bobby as to his course.

"That was a narrow escape," Patsy grunted, taking a deep breath.

"Rather uncomfortable, the whole affair," Nick agreed.

"It did me good to land there when I did."

"You were under the table?"

"Yes, nearly all the time. You know when the French woman went out for the candle? I slipped in, and dropped under the table."

"How did you know I was there?"

"I was watching from the other room."

"From what room?"

"Oh, a little hole in the wall to the right."

"But those two Frenchmen and the girl, and Pierre must have been somewhere around."

"They went upstairs."

"You could see what was transpiring, then?"

"Sure I could. Crack an inch wide in the wall back of one of those fancy rugs they've got hung up. I heard the rumpus in there and sized it all up. I knew what was going on."

"But how in the world did you ever land in the House of the Yellow Door?"

"I've talked with old man Winton. He gave me certain facts. Then I saw Chick, too."

"Oh, you went down to the house?"

"Sure. Chick asked me, when I was up at the office, you know, to go out and look you up. Gave me the address of a little spaghetti joint. I went there and couldn't locate anything. Then I saw Chick and Winton. I got as much as I could and came down to the Old French Quarter."

"But this particular house—the yellow door house, how did you locate that?"

"I was down at the Belvedere. You know George Tavernier. Well, I ran up against George. He told me what had happened there. Explained the whole thing. Grappa had put George rather well on the shelf, but I got enough out of him to know that you were headed this way; or had talked about this joint. What helped was following two people from the Belvedere. That French girl and the fellow, Pierre."

"Clever work, Patsy."

"Thank you, sir."

"You slipped under the table, then?"

"Yes; I figured it all out, but when the old French woman came out, I saw my way clear. I ducked be-

hind her in the darkness and slid under the table. Tapped lightly to let you know there was something doing and cut the ropes, from the under side, one by one."

"You saved the day, Patsy."

Patsy bowed with mock solemnity.

"Have you seen anything of Chick down here?" the detective resumed.

"Not a blink."

"But he must be somewhere in the vicinity. He phoned that he was following Vignaux. That was early last evening. I wonder what has happened to him? Vignaux must have thrown the trail. It's been a busy day. Now make it clear how you've passed your time, Patsy."

"You mean all this twenty-four hours or less, sir?"

"Yes, you got word from Chick last night. Where have you been all the while, I didn't hear from you?"

"Hot on the job. I told you what I did. Pierre and his girl led me right down here. They were both just enough intoxicated to be careless. They left the door open by mistake and I followed them in."

"Good enough."

"Guess it must have been six by then. The two of them managed to get upstairs. I was keen on finding you. I went back down the hall and opened the first door I came to. It was one that led into a stuffy little room at the very back; there were lights and tables. The big French woman, Marie, was presiding and they sold drinks. I guess there must have been a dozen crooks, all told."

"Ah."

"Yes, and they have a wheel—a small one, with card games. I went right in as if I knew the bunch, and mingled; said the Belvedere people had told me of the joint and that I had something to lose. I took a few twirls at the wheel, and honest, Nick, I dug a hole in their wad."

"You won."

"I never saw such luck. That wheel may be crooked, but I had real luck on my side. I raked in everything."

"Good."

"Surest thing you know. When I had my pockets stuffed I tried to move along. Got the knockout."

"Shouldn't have touched anything to drink."

"Wait a minute. There was a pitcher of water on a stand. I was drinking that. The air was something fierce and I had a thirst that was the limit. The last glass I took caught me. They had it all framed up to dose me and got away with it. Guess Marie dropped my potion into the glass and I didn't catch it in time. I went all to pieces in a jiffy."

"And then——"

"Then I knew about as much as a snake in midwinter. Went to sleep. I was in a vacant room, the one I speak of back there, when it all came back. I had a choice line of headaches, and my pockets were stripped. Even the watch I keep in that side pocket was gone. They had everything of value, and a good bunch of hours had passed. It was dark again."

"What time was this?"

"Can't tell you. My watch was gone, wasn't it? I groped around and then saw that dash of light through the crack. I heard voices and my peepers were open. Two or three of the bunch were grouching it; and then they brought old François in, the servant."

"You know about him, then, do you?"

"Sure I do. I'm learning, Mr. Carter. They were browbeating the old chap at a great rate. They expected some one at a certain hour, it seemed. Now I know it was Mr. Winton. I made up my mind I'd wait until this person landed, and I did. They fooled me at first—you did, rather. I thought it was old Winton, honest I did."

"François had me from the start."

"Sure he did. The rest, well, you know, Nick. I guess that table racket will prove to them we're not asleep."

"I regret that the alarm was spread."

"Means we must get on the map mighty quick."

"It does that."

"Anything more on for to-night?"

Nick Carter thought for a second, as the cab jolted on.

"Yes," he finally declared.

"Find Chick?"

"Not exactly."

"Wonder where he is."

"That is what I am trying to figure. For all I know, he may have reported back to the office; then again, he may be at the Winton mansion. I want to ponder a bit, Patsy."

At the nearest drug store, supplied with a telephone booth, Nick Carter spent some short time. He came out, shaking his head and looking a little annoyed and worried.

"I can't get him."

"Not at either place?"

"No."

"I think I can guess what's up," Patsy ventured.

"No guessing necessary, Patsy," the detective responded slowly, his brow puckering. "I know where Chick is. They have him back there—beyond the shadow of a doubt," and his thumb was jerked in the direction of the rainy darkness and the shadowy roofs of houses that made up the Old French Quarter.

CHAPTER XI.

A HAND THROUGH THE DOOR.

Despite the complicated and rather indefinite character of events that had come to pass up to the present hour, Nick Carter was more satisfied than he had been at this stage of a case in a long while. It was not invariably found expedient to take either those

most interested or his own assistants, into the full details. He rather preferred to allow the skein to become slowly untangled until the hour arrived for a final casting of his net.

And that hour was at hand, as we shall shortly see.

He was seated in his upstairs office promptly at daybreak. The morning papers had been spread out neatly by Joseph, and the murder headlines somewhat amused Nick Carter.

The death of Estelle Hollingsworth still puzzled the police.

It was one of the local tragedies that, presumably, would remain a dark mystery forever.

Patsy entered the room, smiling, after a refreshing sleep.

"What is it now, governor; you look as if you meant business?"

"I do, Patsy."

"Sounds good to me."

"If I am not very much mistaken, I think you will find Mr. Hollingsworth at the office of the district attorney some time during the early morning. He appears to have some kind of a pull and will secure a special audience. Take Danny and the machine and drive around. If Hollingsworth is not there, wait for him, understand."

"All right, sir."

"Break in—you know the bunch. Tell the district attorney that I want him to select a few good men, and to jump in my auto. Have Hollingsworth accompany you. I shall expect the outfit to reach Minetta Lane not later than eleven, possibly before. If anything transpires to break up my calculations, you can call me up at Digby's and leave word with Mat. I will stop in twice during the morning."

"But, Mr. Carter——"

"Patsy, I want you to get Danny and hustle for all you're worth."

"Yes, sir."

Looking his old, rested self, Nick Carter, one hour afterwards, might have been found in the vicinity of Washington Square. He remained around those quaint old streets for some time, although his interest appeared to centre about a certain short span of iron fence. The reader will naturally surmise that it was the same fence that hedged in the yard of the Winton mansion. Indeed, the glass conservatory could be easily discerned around the brick corner, every individual pane of glass glittering in the sunshine, for the day had cleared nicely, and the mists had all dispersed.

That Nick met and talked with a big, husky Irish woman, obtained her name and home number, and secured interesting information, we must acknowledge, because of what transpired only a few hours later; yet the detective was unusually secretive. His first visit to that street and locality had been fruitless. His second seemed to please him. He had found Catherine Mullickan, down on her knees, scrubbing the entrance to another old-fashioned house. It was directly opposite the fantastic iron fence enclosure of the Winton place.

After this interview, Nick Carter, on foot, headed for the Old French Quarter. He stopped in at the drug store already known to him, and mentioned in our story, asking if a phone message had been received.

This question was put to a yellow-faced, rather sickly young drug clerk, completely in the detective's confidence.

"No, Mr. Carter, nothing yet," Gammon retorted.

"Some one may possibly call. Answer the phone. Jot down any information that might interest me, Gammon."

"Yes, sir, I will be pleased to do so. A new case?"

"A very important case, Gammon."

"What, might I ask?"

"You will know all about it by five this afternoon."

With this, Nick Carter took his departure, heading for the French Quarter direct and Minetta Street, by the shortest possible route. He did not rest content until he had turned into the narrow way, and could discern the red-tiled roofs, and hear the chatter of many strange tongues.

He came by way of the Church Street entrance. When he turned the first smart curve of the lane, a little, pathetic figure was standing in front of the House of the Yellow Door. Over an arm, a basket of flowers was resting, and the face, so far as Nick Carter could see, was bloodstained.

Beyond her staggered a burly man, stamping and unsteady of stride. He was threatening the child, although the detective, being some distance away, could not make out the words.

With a running bound, Nick Carter reached the spot almost in front of the yellow door. He thought only of the child, since he had recognized her drunken father.

He was a second too late.

The man struck the girl across the head, and she sank to the stones, giving forth a little, final cry of fear and pain.

In an instant, the detective had snatched her up, folding her in his strong embrace. The basket of flowers spilled to the street and Nick swung nearer the yellow door, just as the man, cursing in thick, inarticulate tones, drew a knife and headed for him.

"Let her down—understan'!" he shouted.

"You brute!"

"She belongs to me; my gal, I'll do as I please."

"Not while I'm around, my dear fellow."

"Curse you—then take that!"

The knife whistled through the air. Just as Nick Carter held the little flower girl safely out of harm's way, to better meet the onrushing Frenchman, something unexpected transpired. A sound, as of something grinding and sliding, caught the detective's ears, one of the lower panels of the door slid inward, and

a long hairy arm reached forth, grabbing Nick about the ankle.

Nick was unable to catch himself. He fell backward, striking the stones with much force, and the little flower girl scrambled to her feet, sobbing with fear. The grip of the ankle was a firm, painful one, but Nick Carter knew a way to relieve himself of this embrace. Once he had grasped that arm, bones would snap. A final tug, and the detective was pulled up flush with the yellow door, kicking energetically all the while. As deftly, the door slid inward, the temporary clutch was changed, readjusted and Nick found himself being yanked, feet foremost, indoors.

He could distinguish a little cry from without, the gruff mumbling of the intoxicated man, and a small commotion, after which his immediate environment occupied every atom of his attention. He caught a swift glance of a man's face, and knew his mysterious opponent was the tough companion and pal of the chap beyond the yellow door; one of his assailants of the back room only a short spell before.

In attempting to make his hold on the detective's ankle sure, this fellow stumbled. He went half to his knees, growling under his breath, recovered his footing with Nick Carter almost upon him. Natural cowardice became paramount. The man dashed off down the stuffy little passage as fast as his legs would carry him, bumping against the crudely plastered walls, his heavy shoes awaking the echoes.

Nick was immediately behind him, and in speedy pursuit.

A door slammed with a rattle far ahead. It was so far ahead and the light was so inferior that Nick Carter could not make out the plan of exit or escape. He did remember, with thrilling knowledge, the first door he reached. It led to the den of his night of horror and suspense.

On the table a candle was burning dimly, deep in its socket, sputtering and uncertain.

Was the room empty—not quite.

"Is that you, François?" he demanded, in an authoritative tone.

"Who—who is it?" came in a startled, frightened whisper.

A figure was huddled on the floor against the far wall, a blanket drawn up about the shoulders, and nothing, save the bare floor, as a bed.

"A friend."

"I am afraid—I am afraid," the old servant chattered. As he lifted his head, Nick Carter could read the suffering on that mute, sallow face. The old fellow's eyes were running and he was ghastly of color.

"You needn't be afraid. I've come here to help you. You are François, a servant from the Winton household?"

"Yes, yes."

"And you have been kept in this vile place a prisoner."

"You are speaking the truth, sir."

"Well, now you leave, and in safety. Those who have kept you here are to be very shortly placed in bondage. It is only a question of time. Who is in the house at this moment?"

"I can't tell you, sir, really I can't. I am very ill. I have been ill for hours. They do nothing for me. I shall die."

"All the more reason for you to heed, and quickly, what I say. There is not a fraction of time to lose. François, by the memory of your sainted father, I command you to tell me all you know. You left the Winton home because you were ordered to do so. Who gave you those orders?"

The old man hesitated, falling back among the covers.

"They will kill me."

"They will do nothing of the sort. This house is now under police surveillance. Every rascal in it has gone his limit. Answer me, who arranged that crooked deal; you didn't steal the silver, did you, my man?"

This last aroused the old servant.

"No—no, I did not," he blurted; "how could I, with my master always so good and kind to me. I will tell you, sir, although I do not know you—do not know whether to trust you."

"Your confidence will not be misplaced, François."

"It was a Frenchman, one of my native townsmen, one Pierre Girardin."

"I know that, now for details."

"Pierre knew me in Paris, many years ago. He came to this country before I, yet he was bad—bad. Only lately he has come from the prisons. He hunted me out—he found me. One of the maids must have told him, for he came to the house and lingered in front, until we talked together. He knew of the silverware—he knew how rich my master was. He suggested to me that the theft be committed."

"And you refused?"

"I did, sir; yes, I did."

"This did not end the affair?"

"Ah, no, I was warned. I was told that the secret order to which Pierre belonged would kill me as they would crush a beetle under foot if I did not do as they said. I finally yielded, but not in the way you must suppose."

"How far did you go, François?"

"I left a rear window open; a window opening upon the rear courtyard of the house."

"Why did you not warn Mr. Winton. He could have protected you."

"I am a coward, sir, I confess it. Then, again, you may not know Pierre Girardin. He stand for much treachery. If he says that he will kill, then a man must die."

"Proceed with your story."

"That night they came through the rear court. By crawling upon the conservatory they could step through the window which I had left open. They seemed to know that the silver chest stood in the breakfast room. All this while, sir, saints be merciful,

I lay asleep in my own room. Then they came—came there, in the hush and silence of the night. They commanded me to go with them. They made me take a few things in great haste and accompany them. Then they brought me here. I believe that Pierre did not trust me. He was afraid that I might weaken and say some word."

"They had the silver?"

"The two of them, in long black bags. It was very heavy. I took my things in a sack, also. They moved like spirits. We escaped by means of the rear window, and it was drawn shut again; then out through the court gate, to the street."

"Hector, the butler, alone possessed a key to this gate?"

"It was not exactly a key; it was a twist of metal, but the gate could be opened from the inside, without it; there was simply a clasp that needed turning; we had never been particular about the gate before."

"Could that gate be opened from the outside by one who knew—say, by reaching one's hand through the bars?"

"It could not."

"How then, if some one did not open the lock from the inside, could the men make their entry."

"They managed it, sir, with a child, a little child," François retorted, gulping, and shading his weak eyes from the candlelight.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CATCH AT THE CLIMAX.

Nick Carter felt like crying aloud, so great and intense was his feeling, at the last words spoken by the feeble François. A child had assisted in the theft of the Winton silver; just as he had thought; just as he believed.

"That child," the detective resumed, "was a little flower girl—a mere sprig of a child. Her father accompanied Pierre to the house when the chest was broken open."

"You seem to know, sir. You speaks words of truth. It was she."

"And, because of her size—she is very slight and thin—she could squeeze through the bars, far down by the masonry and enter the court. At this point the bars are sprung. A child of spare bones and little flesh would have no trouble in pushing, pinching through, where it would be impossible for an ordinary person."

"She entered as you say."

"Now, François, a few more hurried questions, and you shall be taken to a more desirable locality. I must know these things now, to verify my personal observations. You were brought here, you say. At this time, did the woman, Marie Felix, have possession of the house?"

"She did."

"The girl, Constantina, is her daughter?"

"Yes, so I hear."

"Then Pierre was working with Marie?"

"They are all one common herd; all knew each other abroad, years ago. I alone, of the old timers, selected better things for my own future. Pierre must have told of his conquests. The loot, I know, sir, was brought here, and I scarcely think it has been disposed of. They will wait until the thing blows over. In the meanwhile, I could not leave the house. They had greater plans."

"Which I know of, François; but please continue."

"Warning notes were sent to Mr. Winton, my master. They were to make him nervous and excited. They knew he was that kind, easily impressed. Mr. Winton, at his home, has a secret safe, in which he keeps many valuables. I believe that he has diamonds there, the worth of which reaches far into many thousands, the property of his deceased wife. I was questioned by Pierre on this subject, sir, but they were unable to torture any adequate information out of me, since I myself was ignorant of the secret hiding place of the safe and vault. My master had never told me. They finally believed me, then a note was taken, at night, to the mansion and delivered. They planned to have Winton here; I was to question him personally, to prove my own guilt, you see, concerning the location of the house vault. It was to be done as though I personally had committed the other robbery and was about to go further. Once this information was in their hands, Winton was to be detained, an immediate raid be made on the vault, and finally Winton would be delivered to his fold, unharmed."

"But they struck the wrong Winton, eh, François?"

"I knew the difference, sir; but were you that man of the night fight?"

"I certainly was, François."

"It was very wonderful, sir."

"It was an adventure, François. Let's see; what else have we in mind. Ah, yes. You saw the well-dressed, stout man that night—the man known as Vignaux. What of him?"

"He is a total stranger, sir. I give my oath."

"Do you know whether the crowd is here now, all of them?"

"I do not. I have been here, sick and trembling for hours. They knew I could not get out. The front door is kept constantly locked."

"I will send some one for you in a few moments, François. Your testimony seems to relieve you of all embarrassing complicity. I shall personally attend to your case."

Nick Carter hurried to the front entrance.

He half expected to see a machine there, and he was not mistaken. Danny yelped at him the moment his head appeared. The district attorney, Hollingsworth and several brawny men, together with Patsy, were in plain view, awaiting some signal to set them right.

The detective did not stop to explain.

He simply intimated that there was trouble brewing and that there was likely to be a round-up of a certain dangerous criminal element. Before entering the house, however, he did stop long enough to pick a little, crushed, bleeding child from a dark corner, behind crates and barrels, and to place her alongside Danny in the machine.

"Care for her, Danny," the detective admonished; "she has been brutally beaten, but we'll stop by the drug store on our way back and fix that up. Poor kid."

The father was nowhere in sight.

Room after room was searched, but they were found, in turn, deserted. The detectives and the district attorney were only casually interested in the gaming apartment, fitted out by the French woman, Marie Felix, for her new trade. Wheel and tables, boxes of cards and dice, bottles of liquors and other stuff, were as they might have been on any busy evening, yet the place was barren of life.

Then the upper floor was looked after.

Here, tucked far back in a dusty closet, the Winton silverware was uncovered, still in the two black bags. There had been a sudden and unpremeditated flight, and Nick Carter was ready to blame himself for this, the result of his remaining too long with François in the lower room.

He had the satisfaction of knowing, however, that the district attorney must learn something in connection with a certain murder mystery, and could set his men to work in the vicinity. Marie Felix had, it seemed, deliberately planned to run a dangerous gambling hovel, and now it could not possibly continue, with the police wise to the character of the House of the Yellow Door.

The first three rooms above were empty. They had not even been supplied with furniture, and were dust-ridden, desolate, chill and uncanny. The doors had to be forced before entering.

They struck for the back of the house.

"Remember what you said, Mr. Carter," Patsy suggested, coming up beside the detective, "Chick might be here."

"Patsy," Nick answered, "we shall find him."

And they did, finally.

Chick Carter, much the worse for wear, bound and cruelly gagged, was eventually unearthed at the rear of the old house. He was in a closet, and the lock had to be broken before Chick could be rescued. He had followed Vignaux that early morning, according to the telephone instruction from his chief. The trail had led, very naturally, to the House of the Yellow Door, but Vignaux was by no means the fat fool he looked, and Chick had met more than his match behind those mysterious walls. He had been overpowered, questioned and shoved into the closet, there to remain until some action could be taken in his case. The hurried flight from the house, however, had prevented this ever taking place, and at the moment of his rescue, thirst, hunger and fatigue had all but gotten the best of him.

"I guess they've gotten away from you, Carter," the district attorney smilingly remarked.

The last room had been reached. One rear door led downward to a lower floor and the stairs were far from inviting.

"No one came out the front way?" Nick inquired.

"No one."

"Then they are here, still, perhaps in the cellar."

"Willing to be shown, Carter."

"Let us try those stairs. They may lead to a secret yard in the rear. No windows this way; can't tell what is back of a Minetta Lane house, you know."

"I think it's useless."

"Nevertheless, we'd better try."

One of the detectives led the way. He turned back, with a startled expression on his face.

"Some one down there; some one groaning," he ejaculated.

The party was immediately alert.

"Let me go first, gentlemen," Nick Carter declared.

Before he could be stopped, he had darted through the door to the staircase, picking his way down it, illuminating the way with his flashlight.

Pierre Girardin lay at the bottom, moaning dismally, his leg doubled up beneath him, splintered; a second door, opening upon a narrow area, brought to view vistas of clothes lines, dingy windows, carts and cobble stones. The man, in attempting to escape with his comrades, had fallen, tripping on the dark stairs. A broken leg is not conducive to speed, so Pierre had been left behind in the mad scramble.

On the end of a low fence, a silk petticoat had been snagged and fluttered in the gray light. The battered fence and open alley through two solemn shanties told how and where the major portion of the rascally crew had made a safe escape on short notice.

Pierre was put through the third degree in the lower room, with François leaning upon his meagre couch, as witness. It was gruelling work and done by men who knew the art to perfection. At first, he stoutly denied any complicity, either with the murder or the robbery; but Nick Carter had a fund of counter irritants up his sleeve. He told of the Irishwoman who had seen a man of Pierre's general appearance, and the little flower girl, at a certain hour, hanging around the iron fence of the Winton mansion. He described how, repeatedly, this little flower girl met by Nick at the beginning of the case, had led him to the House of the Yellow Door; how he had rescued her from her brutal father, and how, bleeding at lip and brow, she had confessed in her own small right. He even had Danny bring the pitiful child in his arms to the room, where she lisped out an acknowledgment of all that Nick Carter stated, even to describing the opening of the gate on the evening of Miss Hollingsworth's murder, for no less a personage than Pierre Girardin. François helped matters, by his own testi-

mony, and Pierre, weakened by pain, could stand the circle of stern faces no longer.

He admitted his guilt, with a face that twisted and reflected the terror, pain and fear of his cringing nature. But it was not his fault, oh, no; he would turn State's evidence; he would tell how the man, Vignaux, had made him do this act.

Vignaux was in charge of the famous Hollingsworth California vineyards. There had been strikes and troubles. Vignaux really wanted to be master of that tract of disputed land. He tried it first by making love to his employer's daughter, fair, graceful, delicate Estelle. The girl repulsed him, as well she might. This angered the quick-tempered Frenchman. She threatened to tell of his advances to her father, and Vignaux became frightened. Back of him stood a stolid, indifferent gang of men, insisting that he take action. A death or two made no difference, so Vignaux had planned to exterminate the only two remaining members of the Hollingsworth family. The girl happened to come first.

Vignaux, backed by the members of his crew, came on to New York for that very purpose, thinking, rightly, that the matter could be better managed in a strange section than where Hollingsworth was so well known. Pierre, already known by Vignaux, was a willing tool. Just out of Sing Sing, money counted, bribes were welcome, and Pierre was soon working François and knew his ground.

Pierre consented to kill the girl and her father. Vignaux knew that Estelle was in the habit of spending her afternoons in the conservatory. So much the better. It was a dastardly blow that might strike down the father as well. Pierre selected his hour. It would be late afternoon. He took the French child along with him, and the gateway was opened in the old style. Then she was told to go.

In passing the conservatory, he just happened to see the body of Estelle. The girl, blindly groping for the door to the house, had tumbled over the half section of barrel, containing the large fern. She was insensible. Placing a plank across the damp, freshly watered flower bed, that there might be no tracks, the murderer had knelt upon it, removed the square of glass and reaching through, pulled the frail figure within reach. All of this Nick Carter had long since decided upon; Pierre Girardin was now simply verifying it, fact for fact. Because of his awkward position, Pierre was compelled to strike twice. The second blow was fatal, and he hurried away, opening the gate from the inside and carrying his terrible weapon with him, a long stiletto.

As for the flower girl's father, he had occupied a dirty room in the old vacant House of the Yellow Door, previous to the coming of its new occupants, and, being of French birth, he had been permitted to remain with the child.

So far as the murder of Miss Hollingsworth and the mysterious Winton theft and blackmail letters were concerned, the case was at an end, with the truth wrung from Pierre Girardin; but Nick Carter was far from satisfied. He was chagrined. Hollingsworth's talk with him did nothing toward relieving the detective's dissatisfaction, although the Californian was immensely grateful at having discovered the real character and treachery of his chief assistant.

The party wound its way out of the Old French Quarter in Nick's fine big machine, Danny at the wheel.

Little Meri, the flower girl, was properly cared for, it goes without saying, and Nick Carter resolved to see to her personally, as soon as Pierre's trial should be consummated. It was Meri, by the way, who explained, in her broken English, how Constantina happened to know Nick. As soon as operations were set on foot, to hoodwink Winton, Pierre and she worked in unison. The French girl was sent to the restaurant that night to watch for Winton, and to keep tabs on any chance interference. From a waiter at the hotel she had inquired concerning the man with Winton, and that waiter, knowing Nick Carter, had whispered his identity.

Girardin, a beaten and suffering wretch, was housed behind bars by afternoon.

Carter promised to appear against him.

In his private office, in Madison Avenue, however, the famous detective refused to be comforted, even by Patsy and Chick.

"To think that they got away from me," he fumed. "I hate to remember it, boys. That crew is roaming free this very minute. Let's see; it is now eight o'clock. I will have a cup of coffee—the blackest that Joseph can find in the house and then——"

"And then, sir?" Patsy interrupted.

Nick Carter blinked a very wise eye.

"We shall see," he responded.

That eventually he rounded up Vignaux and brought him to book the reader, who has long known Nick Carter's methods, knows without telling, and when the arch conspirator finally paid the penalty of his crimes the famous detective felt that he could mark the case off his tablets as settled.

THE END.

The next number (649) will contain "The Triangle Clue; or, Nick Carter's Greenwich Village Case."

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THE MODEL SAFE.

CONCLUSION.

"Now, Mr. Denning, let me explain," proceeded the head of the firm. "I have invented, as you seem to be aware, a thief-catching safe. How you are aware of it you shall tell me later on, for the new safe is not yet on the market, and I imagined its existence was more or less of a secret. Only two of these safes have been constructed; one is over there in that corner, and the other was supplied to an old and valued client of ours, the Wall Street magnate, Lloyd Morrison, who, chancing to come in and see it, promptly insisted upon buying it. We did not wish to sell, but we had to oblige him. Well, the transaction has proved most unfortunate for him and for us. Last night Mr. Morrison's safe was rifled of its contents, consisting of priceless family jewels—heirlooms—which he had deposited in it for extra safety, and which he had refused to trust to an ordinary safe. He bought our special safe solely for the protection of these heirlooms, and the serious part of the business for us is that we guarantee the inviolability of these special safes; so not only is the reputation of our firm at stake, but if Mr. Morrison makes a claim upon us we are legally bound to make good his loss."

"It is most extraordinary, but——"

"Pray, let me finish, Mr. Denning. The safe that was rifled was not broken open. It was opened by some form of skeleton key, not by the right key; we know that, because the alarm bell was set ringing in the middle of the night. It raised Mr. Morrison, who immediately snatched up a revolver and rushed downstairs to the library. He expected to find the thief caught by the steel arms. He found nothing at all. The safe was securely locked, and no one in the room. He imagined the alarm was false, and that the bell had been rung accidentally, but to make quite sure he unlocked the safe, with the result I have told you—everything had been cleared out. To us as a firm the affair is an inexplicable mystery, for we know our safe is absolutely invulnerable, we know there is no flaw in it, and we are forced to the conclusion that either Mr. Morrison i——"

But Frank could contain himself no longer.

"Your safe *has* a flaw in it, I can prove it to you," he cried, leaping up.

"Give me a key or something—anything that'll open it, but not the right key."

"You are a bold young man," said Mr. Limner with a skeptical smile, but he produced a skeleton key which had been used for demonstration purposes in connection with his great invention.

"There you are," he added, "now prove your words. I keep the firm's books in that safe; if you can remove the smallest of them and place it on the mantelpiece I'll double the reward."

"How much will that mean?"

"Ten thousand dollars."

"You'll lose, Mr. Limner."

"I don't think so; come, try!"

Half a minute later Frank had the door of the safe open; and as it swung wide the two steel arms stole swiftly and silently round from the back and gripped him in a vice-like clutch about the legs, while at the same instant an electric bell set up a terrific "whirr" which one might have supposed loud enough to wake the dead. The police captain laughed jubilantly.

"I'd let him stay there a bit if I were you, sir."

"Well, Mr. Denning, what did I tell you?" smiled Limner.

The next moment the door of the safe was slammed to and locked, the steel arms had concealed themselves in the recess, the alarm bell had stopped ringing, and Frank was halfway across the room to the mantelpiece carrying a ponderous ledger.

"I am very much afraid, Mr. Limner, I must trouble you for $10,000."

The captain was gazing at him in open-mouthed wonder.

Mr. Limner rubbed his eyes, unable to believe he had seen aright.

"But how on earth——" he began, and paused in helpless bewilderment, for Frank's action had been so rapid that he hadn't followed how the thing was done.

"Shall I do it again?"

"Yes."

"No, I can explain it without that." And in a few terse sentences Frank pointed out the flaw in the mechanism, how it was perfect as a thief catcher, but how and why it failed as a thief holder.

"Confusion! and I never thought of that," ejaculated Mr. Limner in dismay.

"So much for your special safe, Mr. Limner!"

"It means ruin to us as a firm, Mr. Denning."

"Not if we catch the thief and recover the stolen property," was the swift response.

"Ah!" said the captain, "now we are coming to it. What do you know about the robbery?"

"Actually nothing; but for all that I may be of some service in bringing the guilty person to justice."

And then Frank detailed the circumstances which had brought him into contact with the benevolent old gentleman, who was doubtless the actual thief.

The next hour was a record one in Frank's life.

In the course of it he received a handsome apology from the inspector, a check for $10,000 from Mr. Limner, and ate such a meal as he had not known since the vanished days of his early prosperity.

* * * * * * *

There is very little else to be told.

It was apparent at once that the theft had been effected by some one in the house, not by any one outside, and the point to decide was who of the inmates was the most likely person—which of them would have had the best opportunity; and, eliminating Mr. Morrison himself, suspicion fell with irresistible force on his private secretary, a man named Morton.

Morton was sent for on some trivial excuse, and was held in conversation by Mr. Morrison, while Frank listened unseen, concealed behind a screen. He had not long to wait

five minutes before he was convinced that Morton's voice and the voice of the benevolent old gentleman, who had submitted the model safe to him for his expert opinion, were one and the same, absolutely identical.

Frank suddenly emerged and challenged him:

Morton, who had a fine nerve, at first coolly denied all knowledge of Frank, but when asked to account for his time on the occasion of his two visits to Frank's garret, he broke down and finally confessed.

He restored the stolen property; and Mr. Morrison, who felt that his own carelessness was partly responsible for his secretary's lapse from integrity, declining to prosecute, nothing was ever heard by the public of the theft of the Morrison heirlooms.

Frank Denning is junior partner in the firm of Limner & Co., safe specialists.

The Limner thief-catching safe was a failure, and never came on the market.

Morton had secretly borrowed a working model that had been loaned to his employer, and it was this he left with Frank on the occasion of his first visit.

Will Frank Denning have better success?

We doubt it.

But this much at least is certain, that if it can be done—if anything is mechanically possible—there is no person as likely to accomplish it as Frank Denning, the hero of this story.

FAMOUS STRONG-ROOM ROBBERIES.

Although attacks on safes are more or less of daily occurrence, it is rare indeed that one hears of a successful onslaught by burglars upon a strong room. The most recent case was that which occurred in the West End of London, when burglars succeeded in gaining access to the strong room of Messrs. Debenham and Freebody and carrying off jewelry and precious stones to the value of nearly $50,000.

Indeed, there is a great difference between a safe and a strong room. The latter, being much larger, are invariably built of thicker material, possess very heavy doors and, consequently, more powerful bolts and locks, and to open them is at once a task that demands all the skill and ingenuity of the modern scientific burglar. Then, again, it is only in the banks, the large corporations, the great business institutions, and the safe deposits where we find strong rooms. We get some idea of the enormous strength of these chambers by a description of the ones recently completed for the Carnegie Trust Company in New York.

The strong rooms here are all built of armor plate, the same material as is used in the construction of a modern battle ship. It is five inches thick, and this shell in turn is protected by a wall of concrete twelve inches in thickness. The doors, which are circular in shape, are eighteen inches thick and weigh twenty-five tons apiece. Twenty tons of this weight is in one solid mass of material, seven and one-half feet in diameter, while the remaining five tons are accounted for in the bolt work and mechanism operating the lock. There are twenty-four bolts in each door, each weighing one hundred pounds.

A little time ago a strong room was erected in the basemen of an office building in London for a well-known South African syndicate which is probably as strong as that just mentioned. In this case the armor-plate chamber is protected by a lining of solid concrete into which are laid iron rails, flange to flange, and several feet thick. This material is so hard that it is almost impossible to drill or chip it away. At a test it took two men four days to work away two inches of the material after spoiling $400 worth of tools.

Yet, with all these scientific precautions, the burglar does occasionally break through. The modern Bill Sikes is a clever fellow, who understands the value of chemicals, explosives, and electricity, all of which he calls to his aid. With a drop of nitroglycerin, worked into a joint or crevice, he will blow a steel chamber apart, or burn a hole into it with chemicals. But this takes time, and that is the principal reason why the strong room is so seldom attacked. Again, too, buildings containing them are invariably guarded by watchmen.

Yet it was only two years ago that burglars succeeded in breaking into the strong room of a bank in St. James' Street, in the West End of London, and carrying off a large quantity of gold coin. The bank had only been opened a few weeks, and the appointed caretaker had not taken up his residence there. This gave the burglars their opportunity. They worked their way into the basement of the building from the adjoining house. Their task was a difficult one, because before they could reach the strong room proper they had to cut their way through two walls, one two feet thick and the other nearly four feet thick. Then, by the use of chemicals, explosives, and iron bars, they forced a way into the chamber and secured the booty. The thieves had evidently worked with gloves on, for they left not a single trace of finger prints behind them.

Then the great national banks have certainly attracted the attention of the would-be robber. Some may recall how the directors of the Bank of England once received a letter from a man saying how he had discovered a secret way into their strong room. At first the officials regarded it as a joke, but when a box was delivered at the bank a few days later they thought otherwise. It had been removed from the strong room, and contained many valuable documents. The box was accompanied by a note in which the writer stated that he returned it because he was an honest man, and that if the directors would meet him alone at midnight in the strong room he would explain the mystery to them.

Very uneasy in their minds, they made their way to the vault at the appointed time. Suddenly they heard a voice which they could not locate. It stipulated that lights must be put out, and when this was done a man entered the room with a dark lantern in his hand. He explained how he was connected with the sewers, and how he had discovered that, by removing certain stones, he could gain access to the treasury. The directors voted him a pension of $500 a year for life.

Within quite recent times the Bank of France resorted to a very odd but ingenious method for protecting their bullion. This consisted in engaging masons to wall up the doors of the vaults in the cellar with hydraulic mortar as soon as the money was deposited each day in these receptacles. Then water was turned on and kept running until the whole cellar was flooded.

"SWAG" FOR SALE.

Although it has been impossible to procure proof, a well-known firm of gold and silver refiners, in London, are quite convinced that they have had the stolen Ascot Cup offered them for sale.

A man came to them with an ingot of wonderfully pure gold—twenty carat, corresponding with that of which the famous trophy was made—declaring that he got the metal in Abyssinia, and wished to sell it.

The ingot corresponded not only in fineness, but also in weight, with the Ascot Cup. So it seems, on the face of it, extremely probable that the gold was indeed the smelted remains of the stolen trophy.

Thieves, naturally, prefer hard cash of the realm. This is immediately usable, and cannot, unless previously marked, be identified. Bank notes they are shy of. They may be traced by their numbers. As for jewelry, and most other articles of the kind, they are valuable to the burglar merely

for the jewels they contain, or for the troy weight of the precious metal.

Bill Sikes had no conscience or sentiment on the subject. The most wonderful work of art is promptly relegated to the smelting pot.

Three years ago a famous motor-racing cup was stolen from an exhibition at Olympia. As a work of art, it was worth $5,000. The silver of which it was composed would not have fetched it with the money. Yet, so far as known, this was ruthlessly melted down.

There is a class of burglars who do not deal with "fences," or receivers. They have their own smelting pots and crucibles. The gentleman burglar, "George Robinson," who was at last captured while entering a millionaire's house by means of a rope ladder, had a little workshop of his own, where he melted down all the silverware and jewellery which he stole.

His furnace, with its gas-oxygen flame, was of the very best procurable, and it is a fact that he sold precious metal of the value of $24,000 to the United States Assay Office.

Another criminal of similar type was George Dickinson, known as the "Evening-dress Burglar." He was a skillful mechanic, made his own professional implements, and had a jeweler's furnace and crucible in his home.

In old days the "fence" was the burglar's only resort; and, as a rule, the "fence" paid barely a third of the ordinary market value of the stolen articles. The modern cracksman has done his best to get ahead of the "fence."

One dodge is to take the spoil abroad. Three years ago there was a burglary at the house of Mrs. Val Prinsep, and $30,000 worth of jewellery was stolen. A couple of months later, two Swiss were arrested at Zurich while attempting to sell part of the spoil to a jeweler in that town.

Again, some thieves—pickpockets, principally—who make a specialty of rings, watches, and tie pins, "doctor" the stolen goods, and so alter them that their owners could never recognize them.

For instance, the names of the makers are erased from watches, and other names worked in; jewels are knocked out from pins and rings, and given a different setting.

A "thieves' kitchen," where this kind of "doctoring" was in full swing, was raided by the police in London, and three years' penal servitude was the sentence received by the man who ran the place. He was the head of a regular co-operative society of thieves, who were thus quite independent of the "fence." The stolen articles, when carefully doctored, were pawned.

At one time, cycles were stolen in immense numbers. The London police discovered a cycle shop in Hammersmith which was entirely stocked with stolen machines. It was most difficult to identify the bicycles, for name plates, handle bars, etc., had been altered and exchanged. The total value of the stolen machines was $2,000.

TO THWART THIEVES.

"Do you know if Brown has returned that parcel of stones yet?"

The scene may be the shop of a fashionable jeweler. Costly gems glint in velvet-lined cases. One frock-coated shopman turns casually to another with the perfectly natural question quoted above.

To those customers who may be in the establishment the remark means nothing; but to the man who is addressed it spells volumes. "Brown" is a secret code word, and it means that the elegantly clad woman to whom the speaker is displaying a tray of sparkling stones is suspected by him of being a thief, and that her every action must be watched.

Quite recently, in connection with a terrible outrage in the West End of London, in which an unfortunate money changer was done to death in his office by a desperate robber, the fact was disclosed that, in the case of a sudden attack, it had been arranged that one of the assistants should employ the "distress signal" of hurling a brass paperweight through the window of the office.

Although most people are quite unaware of the fact, practically every banker, money changer, and jeweler in the fashionable quarter of the metropolis has some prearranged code by which one employee may warn all. It allows that a dubious character is visiting the establishment.

In one well-known bank this is the system adopted: Should a cashier's suspicions be aroused by the actions or speech of a man upon the other side of the counter, he will step across, in a perfectly innocent way, to a certain desk which stands quite apart from the others. The custodian at the doorway sees the action, knows its significance, and is instantly upon the alert.

In the case of another bank the cashier whose suspicions are aroused need not even move away from his desk to warn the watcher. The scheme employed is this: Along the guarding rail of the counter are a series of plates, bearing the word "Payer" or "Receiver," according to the duties of the cashier in each particular section.

These, by design, are all placed slightly askew. Should one of the officials behind the desks suspect an individual to whom he is attending, all he has to do, in order to place the patrol in uniform upon the qui vive, is to reach up a leisurely hand and turn one of these plates so that it is in a perfectly straight line with the rail from which it projects.

The ingenuity of this idea lies in the fact that, while the action is perfectly natural, it is so unmistakable that even when the bank is full of people it cannot fail to be observed by the man who is upon the lookout.

Quite the most elaborate system of which details are obtainable is that installed by a firm of electrical engineers for one prominent West End jeweler. The manager who is on duty sits at a glass-screened desk in the rear of the shop, in such a position that, while scarcely being seen himself, and certainly without making any movement, he has an absolutely unimpeded view of every counter and showcase.

Near him, on a small board, shielded from view, is a row of tiny red electric light bulbs. One corresponds to the position of each of the suave assistants who attends to the wants of the jewel buying public. Sunk in the floor, near the foot of each assistant, is a button; and his duty is done when, should he think a customer he is serving may not be "on the square," he places his foot on this convenient button. The little glowlamp lights up at the other end of the wire, and the manager's attention is promptly focussed in the direction indicated.

Should his keen scrutiny reveal an actual theft from the articles displayed on the counter, or from some unprotected tray, he himself presses a button as the thief turns to leave the shop. This serves to warn a smart attendant who is on duty at the portals, and the wrongdoer finds his or her pathway barred, without a word having been uttered or sign of warning given.

SCHOOL FOR BURGLARS.

A remarkable institution has been discovered in Paris. It is described as a "school of modern burglary," and was established with barefaced effrontery in the Rue Poissionere, a thoroughfare in the centre of the city.

There were scores of students, many of whom have graduated, and are now either preying upon the public or are in jail. Theoretical and practical housebreaking was taught by an ex-chauffeur, and at night he was in the habit of taking the more promising of his pupils to various parts of the suburbs, where, under his personal supervision, they broke into and robbed many houses.

The police made a descent on the school, and arrested professor and pupils. A special class was held for young women, who were taught pocket-picking and shoplifting.

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